EDITED BY
HELEN KINGSTONE AND JENNIE BRISTOW

Studying Generations

Multidisciplinary Perspectives

GENERATIONS, TRANSITIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Generations, Transitions and Social Change

Series Editors: **Elisabetta Ruspini**, University of Milano-Bicocca and **Jennie Bristow**, Canterbury Christ Church University

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This series provides a home for new work in generational studies.

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STUDYING GENERATIONS

Multidisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by
Helen Kingstone and Jennie Bristow

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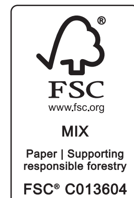

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Series Editor Preface

Elisabetta Ruspini (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy)

It is a pleasure to publish this book as the first in the new book series focused on 'Generations, Transitions and Social Change'. As Helen Kingstone and Jennie Bristow note in the Introduction, this book has been developed to take forward the conversation about the concept of generations. In doing so, it raises a number of questions for multi- and interdisciplinary scholarship and research in the rapidly developing field of generational studies.

Generational studies has emerged from a growing interest in the concept of generation across a range of disciplines, as scholars and researchers seek to understand social, economic and political trends distinctive to the 21st century. The primary focus for this new series is on books that advance scholarship and research on generations within a number of disciplines, such as sociology, social policy, cultural studies, memory studies, anthropology and demography. The chapters in this volume reflect some discussions in some of those disciplines, and they are intended as a starting point for the ongoing exploration of the various ways in which 'generation' is both understood and applied. It is a fascinating and expansive concept, which can illuminate a great deal about our present historical moment: but, as this book indicates, needs to be handled with some care.

In a rapidly changing world where the forces put in place by globalization have unsettled established frameworks and categories, 'generation' has allowed an alternative way of exploring social and interpersonal connections and conflicts, situating experience within historical time. The concept of generation is one of the most important theoretical and empirical lenses for interpreting social change. The study of generations is becoming increasingly prominent beyond Anglo-American cultures and developing in Continental Europe, India and China. Perspectives from the Global South add to the existing body of empirical research, provide deeper cross-cultural comparisons, and potentially unsettle the conceptual framing of 'generation' as it has emerged and developed in Western social theory.

The chapters in this book also point to the problem of 'generationalism': the use of poorly defined ideas about generations to act as metanarratives for a

host of social issues and problems, which may be better understood in other ways. For example, there are particular questions to do with demographic ageing, economic inequality, youth transitions, gender relations and a host of other issues routinely discussed through the generational frame, which invite analysis in their own terms and within particular disciplinary boundaries. There is a generational component to all these discussions, but it does not define them.

In a similar way, this book highlights the exciting potential of the concept of generation for interdisciplinary research and scholarship – while also advising caution about the problems that can arise when the concept is fully 'freed' from subject boundaries. The danger, here, is that 'generations' becomes a catch-all term that is widely, but loosely, used by people speaking the same language about quite different conceptual interpretations. The book's offer of 'multidisciplinary perspectives' underlines the importance of starting with the question of what the concept of generations can offer scholars of sociology, politics, literature, history, psychology – and building on these distinctive interpretations to gain a more expansive understanding.

The 'Generations, Transitions and Social Change' series will be distinctive for its primary focus on 'generations' as an analytical frame and for its scope to develop the use of the concept both within and between specific academic disciplines. Given the increased prominence of 'generations' in political, media, and policy debates, we also intend the series to have relevance for those engaged in debates and policy-making outside the academy: to further the constructive use of the concept, while cautioning against its often reductive application. This book provides an excellent starting point for anybody studying, or working with, the idea of generations.

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1

Introduction

Helen Kingstone and Jennie Bristow

What's in the concept of generation, and how should it be used? In exploring these two questions, this book seeks to introduce readers to the interdisciplinary potential of, and the intellectual tensions within, the field of generational studies.

The concept of generation has focused sociological interest and debate since the 1920s when sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim tried to define the 'problem of generations' (Mannheim, 1952 [1928]). It has developed in a number of directions in the subsequent century, often in conversation with related disciplines. It is a concept that is both instantly recognizable and open to numerous interpretations. For social scientists, explains Burnett (2010, p 1), 'generation is a dual concept, referring both to family and kinship structures on the one hand, and cohorts (or age sets) on the other'. However, 'like all language', it is mutable and 'has been subject to change in the flow of history and circumstance in which it has been put to work'. Burnett thus notes the paradox that:

> The concept of generation has been charged with being too empty and slippery to be of much use; yet these characteristics are a function of its survival over thousands of years and the diversity of human formation and experience which it has named. (Burnett, 2010, p 1)

The 'polysemous usage' of generation, and the resulting 'confusion in generational studies' (Kertzer, 1983, pp 127–8), has proved a frustration for social scientists for many decades. When we consider the concept's use in other academic disciplines, and its common usage outside academia, we see that the concept describes a range of human, natural, cultural and technological phenomena. The aim of this book is not to provide a comprehensive etymology of the word 'generation' in all its uses, nor to

provide a definitive 'answer' to the question of what a generation actually *is*. Rather, it is to develop the ongoing conversation about how the concept has been deployed, in different ways, within the humanities and social sciences; and the ways it is currently used, in political debates and policy frameworks.

This conversation was the starting point of the Generations network, an interdisciplinary group of academics and policy-facing organizations working with the concept of generation, established by Helen and Jennie in 2019; and the book is one outcome of discussions within this network over the subsequent years. Below, we briefly recount the discussions explored by the Generations network project, and the key questions we identified for consideration when talking about generations. We then outline the structure of this book. First, however, it is worth reviewing the many meanings attached to the concept, and asking why, today, generations have become such a talking point.

The 'generational turn' in culture and society

The study of generation has emerged from a heightened cultural interest in the concept's potential to capture something about people's relationships with each other and their historical time, which can elude many of the established frameworks and categories through which scholars have tended to understand social developments, divisions, and experiences.

As noted previously, modern scholarship on generations was instigated by sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim, whose ideas receive extended attention in Chapter 2. He developed his influential theory of social generations in the aftermath of the First World War, and he argued that generations emerge based on the socially transformative events that take place during people's adolescence and early adulthood, what he called the 'formative period' (Mannheim, 1952 [1928]). Upheavals are therefore particularly conducive to development of strong social generations, and Mannheim suggested that these first came into being in the turmoil of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars (1789–1815), a periodization that we will come back to in Chapter 3.

Generational studies in its own right emerged over the 20th century, developing as academics attempted to make sense of the cultural upheavals of the 1960s (Bristow, 2015). It gained wider academic and media attention around the dawn of the 21st century, as powerful cultural, political and economic trends were unsettling the terrain on which social conflicts and interpersonal connections had been theorized. From sexual relations to the institution of the family, from class solidarities to gender norms, the conventional borders and binaries of social and political life were superseded by concepts that sought to capture the combination of fragmentation and inter-connectedness that seemed to characterize the Millennial moment.

In different but related ways, concepts such as risk, globalization, fluidity, decoloniality and individualization spoke to decentring of the norms and structures that had previously been the focus of Western intellectual thought.

This unsettling of established boundaries and conventions was not a purely theoretical project, nor one that confined itself to a particular discipline. Across the social and political sciences, the humanities and the arts, there was a shared recognition of the need for new tools and concepts to make sense, in real time, of this new epoch. Beyond the academy, political and cultural institutions were already moving outside the boxes in which they had operated and finding distinctive ways to establish themselves in these novel times. For example, in the UK, Tony Blair's New Labour government took up the mantle of US President Bill Clinton's 'Third Way', to describe a centrist approach that self-consciously took politics 'beyond left and right' (Giddens, 1994, 1998). Government departments worked together on policy making, and the focus was on youth and novelty, encapsulated in the promotion of 'Cool Britannia'.

The technology sector in the US, headed by bright young things, was rewriting the rules of social interaction to an extent that would not become apparent for a decade. The old jobs of the rapidly deindustrializing West would not be passed from father to son but outsourced to countries where different economic rules and cultural norms applied. Education expanded and became focused on keeping up with these new trends. Meanwhile, the trends shaping Western societies in the 'second demographic transition' first theorized in the 1980s, and characterized by falling birthrates, relatively high levels of migration and increasing life expectancy (Lesthaeghe, 2014), brought pressures for social policy in managing 'ageing societies'.

In this context, generation came to the fore as an alternative way of exploring social and interpersonal connections and conflicts, situating experience within historical time. As all the chapters in this book indicate, when handled with care, the concept of generation can expand our understanding. Between academic disciplines, differing interpretations currently exist of the concept of generations. This provides the basis for a more rounded and expansive understanding but also the potential for confusion, as researchers engaged in the study of the same topic can end up talking past each other.

This is a particular problem since generation has become routinely used as a frame in politics and policy. The UK now has All-Party Parliamentary Groups focused on 'future generations', 'inheritance and intergenerational fairness' and 'communities of inquiry across the generations'. Wales has a Future Generations Commissioner, and the label of 'the Covid generation' has been widely applied to children and young people who lived through the recent pandemic. A range of organizations and projects work to celebrate

intergenerational relationships to respond to social ills, often framing the concept of 'generation' in quite different ways.

Recent events, such as the 2007–8 Global Financial Crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–21, have revealed our dependence on intergenerational relationships, both within and beyond the family, but have also exacerbated intergenerational inequalities. Deeper trends related to globalization have brought to the fore some important cultural, demographic, and societal differences surrounding the meaning and experience of 'generation', which need to be sensitively and reflexively understood rather than subsumed into generalized frameworks. Since the 'generations' rhetoric is likely to ramp up even further, we need to make sure that it is nuanced, informed and used productively.

It was in this climate of intensive but contradictory use of the generations concept that we set up the interdisciplinary Generations network in 2019. With funding from Wellcome, we built a network that brought together scholars from across the humanities and social sciences, along with representatives from third sector organizations including two partners: BPAS (the British Pregnancy Advisory Service), for their expertise on familial generations, and ILC-UK (the International Longevity Centre UK), for their expertise on the impacts of an ageing society. During 2020 and early 2021, we held a series of workshops on different aspects of the generations concept: 'Generations in the family and the problem of "parenting"', 'Generational identities and the problem of "presentism"', 'Intergenerational Relationships' and 'Generational identities and historical events'.[1] The Covid-19 pandemic forced all but the first workshop online but also meant that we had contributions from a valuably international and geographically dispersed group. Finally, we held a consultation workshop specifically with a wider group of third-sector organizations, at which we co-wrote our toolkit for 'Talking about Generations: 5 questions to ask yourself': questions that we elaborate later.

This book is one outcome of that work. It introduces and explores the growing field of 'generational studies', by outlining ways that a generational lens is and can be used in a range of disciplines: Sociology and Social Policy, Literary Studies, History of Science, Media Studies, Politics, Psychology and Psychotherapy, and Social Enterprise. The contributors have all been working closely together through the Generations network, building a mutually synthesized, interdisciplinary working understanding that we hope will be useful for scholars across multiple disciplines. This book makes a commitment to addressing the topical issues of generational debates head-on but doing so without blame: other recent popular books about generations have assumed that 'Baby Boomers' and 'Millennials' or 'old' and 'young' are in conflict and in competition for future resources, a view that is also influential and problematic in media and policy debates. Here we invite

you to come with us beyond any such reductive and unhelpful paradigms, to offer new avenues for generational thinking.

Five questions for generational studies

We suggest, as a starting point, that those working with the concept of generation ask themselves five questions:

1. *What* are you talking about?
2. *Who* are you talking about?
3. *Where* are you talking about?
4. *Why* are you talking about generations?
5. Who are you talking *to*?

Reflections on these questions form the starting point of this book.

Question 1: *what* is being talked about? The 'generations' concept is complex partly because it has two different meanings fruitfully in use at the same time. It refers to different generations in a family (grandparents, parents, children and so on) but also across society to contemporaries in the same age group (Burnett, 2010, pp 1–2). The first has long been recorded and celebrated in genealogical terms, and Buklijas expands on the evolution of generation's genetic sensibility in Chapter 4. Over the past two centuries (as Kingstone shows in Chapter 3), a second meaning has developed, which instead looks beyond the family, and refers to contemporaries in the same cohort strata. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2023) lists the term as being used in several other senses too, including to refer to the relativity of generational relations between people and to the stages in development of a product or technology, both of which use the same terminology of ordinal numbers: first-generation, second-generation and so on. This epitomizes the way that generation has escaped its original bounds and become both literal and metaphorical in usage.

The concept of generations therefore has significance both within the family and across society. We can think of these dimensions as 'vertical' and 'lateral': the familial meaning indicates the passing of time, whereas the social meaning focuses on contemporaries. Complicating matters further, 'vertical' relationships between generations do not exist only in families but permeate work and community life, bringing members of different generations in constant contact with each other.

Developing a sense of clarity about what we mean when we talk about generations is particularly important as the concept is not disembodied but used to describe groups of people. In respect of cohorts, demographers and sociologists are widely agreed on a generational schema we can use to refer to the social generations that have been born since the Second World

War: the 'Baby Boomers' (born 1945 to 1964), 'Generation X' (born 1965–80), 'Generation Y', (born 1981–96), known as 'Millennials' since the eldest of them came of age around the Millennium, and 'Generation Z' (born 1997–2012); the current crop of young children are as yet unlabelled in this way. The categories, their birth-year spans and their associated stereotypes have their own problems, which we will return to later, but these are what we mean when we talk about social generations in contemporary society.

All too often, however, commentators erroneously use the term 'generation' to refer to groups such as '60–65-year olds', which are specifically age groups. These are much smaller and more specific strata of people, which potentially cut across social generation categories since the personnel within the age group changes over time. When people refer to even narrower time periods such as 'the Class of 1966', the same issues apply, and in this case the more precise term would be cohort: a group defined by its institutional function. Similarly, simplistic phrases like 'older and younger generations' are really referring to life stages. And the phrase 'once in a generation vote', used in the UK to mobilize for both the 2014 Referendum on Scottish Independence and the 2016 Brexit Referendum, is deliberately using the emotive word 'generation' to evoke a broad, but crucially indefinite, period of time, that can be redefined dependent on the political advantage.

Question 2: *who* is being referred to? Do intra-generational differences (that is, variation across a cohort) fundamentally undermine the generational concept, or simply nuance it? A key limitation of the concept of social generations, when mis-used, is that it artificially homogenizes a diverse population. Current discourse surrounding terms like 'Boomer', 'Karen' or 'Millennial' are often based on stereotypes of a white, middle-class, educated minority and treated as if representative of the whole. That can exclude or simply obscure a range of quite different experiences. Generational categories also, of course, intersect with other categories of identity. Minority groups, including migrants and LGBTQI+, often have different generational markers, as is discussed further in Chapters 4, 8 and 9.

Specificity is also crucial when situating discussion of generation within time and place, bringing us to question 3, *where*. Historical and demographic differences mean that no single schema can be applied globally. Generations form through historical events and upheavals (for example, the Spanish Civil War in 1930s Spain; the Windrush migration in late-1940s Britain), that are often distinct to particular national contexts. Claims about the size, or the experience, of birth cohorts in one society should not be mapped on to another society without attention to the differences. Decolonial and postcolonial challenges to homogenizing concepts and discourses should be taken seriously here: norms and values related to family, youth and social time differ across societies, and concepts of generation developed within European and Anglo-American cultures are not directly applicable everywhere.

As generation engages explicitly with temporality, historical context also matters in how we use and employ the concept, as we see in Chapters 3 and 6. This, in turn, raises a fourth question: *why* generations are being discussed, and how claims about generations are used. We can acknowledge that generation is an important consideration for some policy discussions and decisions, but it should not operate as an overarching frame in this domain. As explored in Chapters 2 and 4, 'generational divisions' should not be emphasized to evade discussions of other social divisions. Sometimes what appear to be generational differences are in fact a result of something else such as material deprivation, cultural differences, or inequalities related to class, gender, and/or ethnicity. Politicized uses of 'generation' tend to co-opt young people into particular stances, by blaming 'older voters' for democratic choices or assuming a single 'voice of youth'. Generational language such as 'Millennial vs Boomer' is often applied as a proxy for the binary categories of 'young vs old'. Precise generational language and analysis will allow us to go beyond simplistic and potentially divisive dichotomies.

Finally, when drawing on generational categories we need to ask ourselves who we are talking *to*. Generational analysis is important because it helps us identify differences between groups. However, differences should not be emphasized at the expense of what people have in common. Where there are differences, this does not automatically need to produce antagonism: differences in experience, skills, outlook and resources can be complementary and produce solidarity. Generations do not exist in isolation but are constantly interacting and interdependent via reciprocal relationships of support. Too much policy discussion currently focuses exclusively on intergenerational asset transfer or 'justice' – using a deficit model – rather than what generations can gain from each other. Supporting intergenerational cooperation and solidarity requires bringing different generational groupings into a conversation about social problems and solutions, both with policy makers, and with each other.

Studying generations is exciting and challenging partly because, as we have seen, its referents are perpetually under debate. French historian of identity and memory Pierre Nora asks some important questions about how social generations form and function:

> Exactly what role do events play in the determination of a generation, where the term *events*, broadly construed, encompasses both ordinary experience and *the* traumatic event? Is generation a conscious or unconscious phenomenon? Is it something imposed from without or freely chosen? Is it a statistical or a psychological phenomenon? Or, to put it another way, who does and who does not belong to a given generation, and how does that belonging manifest itself, given that one

> or more different age cohorts may identify with a generation without taking part in the vicissitudes of its existence? (Nora, 1996, p 505)

These are questions that we take forward through the rest of this volume.

Structure of this book

Part I, 'The Generations Concept in Historical and Contemporary Perspective', comprises four substantial chapters reviewing how the concept has developed and is used in four fields: sociology and social policy, literary and historical studies, media and politics, and history of science. The aim of these chapters is to introduce students, scholars, and others interested in generations to how the concept is used across a range of disciplines, until now in limitingly separate ways. As such, Part I takes the form of a 'reader' on generational studies, mapping out this sub-field and identifying its limitations and potential. It begins with chapters from each co-editor, outlining the current position of the generations concept in social sciences and humanities scholarship respectively, and showing how each of those fields next needs to adapt and grow.

In Chapter 2, Jennie Bristow reviews the problem of 'social generations' as it has been developed and debated within the discipline of sociology, with particular regard to its relationship to contemporary social, historical and political developments. By theorizing the significance of generations within the transmission and development of knowledge, Mannheim's (1952 [1928]) essay on 'The problem of generations' provided a framework for understanding the emergence and significance of generational consciousness in relation to wider social and cultural events. However, despite its influence, Mannheim's theory of 'social generations' is not the only way in which sociologists understand the concept. In evaluating the power and limitations of the 'social generations' concept, through engaging with subsequent social and theoretical developments and critiques, Chapter 2 reviews different approaches to the study of generations. It suggests that the emergence of the life course approach reflects the increasing fluidity of kinship relations and personal 'life stages' from the latter part of the 20th century, providing a more nuanced and reflexive approach to understanding the experience of growing up and ageing (Pilcher, 1995). The chapter further suggests that the increasing appeal of ideas about 'social generations' partly reflects the increasing salience of generational analysis to a 'post-political' age increasingly concerned with identity, and partly reflects the misunderstanding and extension of this analysis into crude generational labels and stereotypes (Bristow, 2019).

By way of illustration, Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of generational consciousness and labelling in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This historical moment has brought to the fore many existing features of

the problem of generations, including the emergence of generational consciousness; the potential for tensions and collaboration between the generations; the difficulties expressed by modern societies in educating and socializing young people; and the problems of adult identity and authority. At the same time, political and media attempts to summarize and predict the life chances of the 'Covid generation' risk disregarding the nuances of generational analysis to present an overstated polarization of 'young vs old', and flattening out the diversity of experiences between young people globally.

In Chapter 3, Helen Kingstone argues that discussions of generations need to take into account the concept's long and non-linear history. Social generations and their associated identities began to emerge about 200 years ago, in the upheavals of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars (Mannheim, 1952). Scholars' understanding of social generations, which has previously focused on the post-1945 period, therefore needs to address at least the past two centuries. This chapter surveys the current state of engagement with 'generations' in the humanities, particularly in literary and historical studies. The chapter then examines the nature of generational affiliations and identities across the period 1800–1945. Kingstone shows that generational identities were deep-rooted, though socially narrow, in 19th-century Britain: bourgeois intellectual movements were notably generation-conscious, but the working-class majority had quite different markers of age and maturation. In the early 20th century, the First World War produced more-widespread division between the generation who commanded the army and the 'Lost Generation' whose lives were shattered by it, followed by a post-war generation who turned away from it completely (Erll, 2014). Subsequently, the Holocaust and post-Second World War migration have raised the question of how social and genealogical generation interrelate (Weigel, 2002). Both have been mass events impacting society, but the 'first-/second-/third-generation' taxonomy in which we discuss these impacts is rooted in family relationships and 'postmemory' (Hirsch, 2012).

Chapter 3's final section shows that these tensions between generation's social and familial dimensions were well-recognized even back in the 19th century. A case study is offered of Margaret Oliphant's novel *Hester* (1883), which depicts two successive generational moments when young women have to rise to the challenge to rescue their community. In the novel, age-definition is used to patronize and homogenize, showing that our ageing society's failure to distinguish effectively between different generations within the 'older' population is nothing new. Equally significantly, the novel also showcases intergenerational friendships that break out of genealogical conventions, demonstrating that these relationships are powerful when reciprocal.

In Chapter 4, Tatjana Buklijas showcases the generations concept's dynamic career in science and medicine. She charts the emergence of

epigenetics from the study of cell cultures through animal studies, leading to its application to understanding transmission between generations of humans. The development of epigenetics, Buklijas explains, was preceded by the growing availability and authority of psychoanalytic psychiatry. This emerged in North America following the Second World War and was bound up with attempts to understand the impact of the Holocaust on the offspring of its victims. The concept of inherited trauma came to constitute a medical phenomenon, and the idea of 'intergenerational cycles' offered explanations based on biological and environmental factors that were distanced from earlier eugenic approaches. Epigenetics complicates the idea that inheritance is determined by genetics alone, and it speaks to the double meaning of 'generation' as a biological and environmental concept.

In Chapter 5, Ben Little and Alison Winch argue that generation is a key but underused term for cultural studies, since it helps to map the type of large-scale cultural change that Stuart Hall terms the conjuncture. In the process, they examine the abuse of the generations concept: what happens when generations are over-generalized and weaponized to become 'generationalism'. They examine think tank literature, and the discursive figure of the Millennial, as particularly utilized by Facebook and Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg. The problem comes when by moving into popular political discourse, generation becomes obfuscatory and deflective, serving as a means to shore up a conservative agenda, or to restore a radical movement to 'traditional' foundations.

Part II, 'Studies of the Generations Concept in Contemporary Life', introduces new empirical studies from a range of disciplines, illustrating the breadth of generational studies as a sub-field and diverse ways in which a generational lens can be applied. The four shorter chapters in Part II provide a topical and applied dimension, bringing to life the debates about generation within and between disciplines.

In Chapter 6, literary scholar David Amigoni examines the current rise of literature about intergenerational relationships, and asks what its implications are for those working to regenerate places and communities, and for organizations seeking effective intergenerational practice in an ageing society. Where Chapter 3 traced 19th-century literary depictions of these issues, this chapter shows how they are being dealt with in contemporary literature. Amigoni examines a recent popular novel, Libby Page's *The Lido* (2018), which focuses on an intergenerational friendship and its benefits for both parties. He compares it with John Crace's *Arcadia* (1992), a novel about ageing and place-making that is emphatically not 'feel good' on intergenerational relationships. As he argues, this comparison highlights the very particular policy moment in which *The Lido* gained its popularity. He also reflects on the power of recent intergenerational place-based regeneration projects that have foregrounded older age as the 'Age of Creativity'.

In Chapter 7, intergenerational practitioner and consultant Ali Somers guides us through the expanding wealth of intergenerational projects taking place worldwide, viewing them in three categories: (1) intergenerational learning between children and older people living in care settings; (2) intergenerational housing; and (3) intergenerational training/mentoring initiatives. She explores how notions of generational identity are sometimes affirmed by intergenerational engagement and are also often contested. Importantly, she suggests that we gain a different understanding of generational identity and its functions when we view it through the lens of intergenerational programming.

In Chapter 8, psychotherapist Nigel Williams puts forward the concept of the multigenerational self, adapted from First Nations people. This concept indicates the extent to which our identity, selfhood and even memories are conditioned by those of our parents and forebears, and the extent to which we shape those of future generations. In the First Nations cultures that Williams draws upon, the multigenerational self extends 'for seven generations, comprising three generations in the past and three unborn in the future, with the everyday self or ego occupying the middle zone of this deep self in time'. Williams argues that by adopting a 'seven-generation approach' to social responsibility, transgenerational transmission of trauma can be addressed in order to help future and as yet unborn generations.

In Chapter 9, sociologists Andrew King and Matthew Hall rethink the concept of social generations from a queer perspective. One of the limitations of current generations discourse lies in how it homogenizes peer-groups, and unintentionally silences marginalized voices and experiences. Their chapter interrupts this silence by thinking about lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ+) lives generationally – to consider what it means for both how we understand generations and how LGBTQ+ people's lives are framed by the cisheteronormativity of 'generations' as a concept. King and Hall apply a generational lens to the lives of LGBTQ+ people living in England who were interviewed as part of a big research project, 'Comparing Intersectional Life Course Inequalities among LGBTQI+ Citizens in Four European Countries' (2018–2021). In making sense of these narratives, King and Hall discuss how normative models of generation don't 'fit' LGBTQ+ lives and argue that taking LGBTQ+ lives seriously means re-assessing what a generation is, how it forms in relation to historical events, and how in/equalities persist and are resisted.

The concluding chapter reflects on all these contributions, and points to new developments in generational studies.

Note

[1] We benefited from presentations on familial generations from Nigel Williams (forming the core of this book's Chapter 8) and also from Arun Himawan (ILC), Katherine

O'Brien and Rebecca Blaylock (BPAS), care studies ethicist Ann Gallagher (Exeter), psychologist Erica Hepper (Surrey), historian Ellie Murray (Leeds) and parenting culture studies scholar Ellie Lee (Kent). On generational identities, we heard from Jennie Bristow (see Chapter 2), and also from sociologist Judith Burnett (consultant), psychologist Peter Hegarty (Open University), sociologist Jan Macvarish, gerontologist Karen Glaser (King's College London), literary scholar Trev Broughton (York), and historian Martin Hewitt (Anglia Ruskin). On intergenerational relationships, we heard from Ali Somers (see Chapter 7) and from sociologist Cissie Buxton (Canterbury Christ Church), public health scholar Michael Toze (Lincoln), anthropologist Carys Banks (Surrey) and psychologist Kate Howson (Swansea). Presentations on how generational identities relate to historical events came from Helen Kingstone (see Chapter 3), Tatjana Buklijas (see Chapter 4) and Matthew Hall and Andrew King (see Chapter 9), and also from memory studies scholar Astrid Erll (Goethe University, Frankfurt), social and cultural historian Lucy Bland (Anglia Ruskin) and oral historian Ruth Blue (Thalidomide Society). These presentations were always met with further dynamic and fruitful responses from other network members at the workshops, and we thank them all. For further information about the workshops and their presentations, see https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/parentingculturestudies/research-themes/generations/generations-the-network

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PART I

The Generations Concept in Historical and Contemporary Perspective

2

Sociology and the Problem of 'Social Generations'

Jennie Bristow

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, in spring 2020, I teamed up with my then 15-year-old daughter to write a think piece, *The Corona Generation: Coming of age in a crisis* (Bristow and Gilland, 2020). We were troubled by the way in which the response to this pandemic was, from the outset, framed around the need for enforced distancing between the generations. In initial, practical terms, this imperative reflected the dangers of Covid-19 as a disease, which increased progressively with age: posing minimal risk to children and young adults but a serious danger to the elderly (Spiegelhalter, 2020). But across large parts of the world, and particularly in the Global North, lockdowns and social distancing measures quickly took on a more metaphorical dimension reflective of the cultural 'generation wars'.

A storm erupted over social media memes that badged this novel coronavirus as a 'Boomer Remover' (Elliott, 2022); nature's payback for the allegedly selfish, irresponsible and environmentally careless behaviour of the 'Baby Boomer generation'. Official campaigns targeted young people with the message that they should not consider themselves 'invincible' in the face of the virus (Nebehay, 2020) and that failure to heed social distancing regulations could result in their bearing responsibility for 'killing granny' (Bristow, 2021b). As the months went by, concerns about the effect of prolonged school closures and young people's isolation from the social world ignited some bitter arguments about whether we were sacrificing the needs of the young to the wellbeing of the old, or prioritizing the demands of the present emergency over the needs of the future.

Debates about the 'Covid generation' reflect long-running tensions within sociology about the lack of precision with which the concept of generation is conceptualized and employed: and the rapid transformation

of the pandemic experience into a generational problem raises some big questions for sociologists today.

The German scholars Rudolph and Zacher (2020) discuss how 'generationalized rhetoric' around the Covid-19 pandemic reproduced 'the various conceptual, methodological and practical problems associated with the (mis)application of generations for making sense of uncertain times' (p 139). These include longstanding empirical difficulties involved in the study of generations, such as the problem of separating cohort effects ('differences in attitudes, values, or behaviors that can be tied to birth year differences'), from age effects ('the influence of developmental processes'), and period effects, which 'are typically taken as evidence for the influence of contemporaneous time, including the role that important current events play (e.g., economic conditions, national conflicts, one-off events, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic) in shaping attitudes, values, and behaviors' (Rudolph and Zacher, 2020, p 141).

But the sociological problem of generations is not only, or mainly, one of empirical application. As Rudolph and Zacher write, generationalized pandemic rhetoric reflected and reinforced ageism directed against elderly people, in the form of the idea that older lives are 'worth less' than those of younger people. It also captured a sense of fatalism regarding the prospects for the young:

> [I]f scholars, journals, and policy-makers broadly characterize the 'COVID-19 Generation' as, for instance, insecure or socially challenged, this may not only lead to age-based discrimination of individuals assumed to belong to this generation, but may also have 'self-fulfilling prophecy' for these individuals in terms of their attitudes, values, and behaviors. (Rudolph and Zacher, 2020, p 142)

In evaluating the power and limitations of 'social generations', this chapter first provides a brief review of the ways that sociologists have explored the concept. Interest in generations emerged from a desire to understand the fraught relationship between continuity and change. Too often, however, ideas about generations are deployed with a globalizing and homogenizing logic, which reduces complex social and political problems to matters of demography and policy and emphasizes 'change' at the expense of acknowledging the importance of continuity. In this vein, most political and media attempts to summarize and predict the life chances of the 'Covid generation' risk disregarding the nuances of generational analysis to present an overstated polarization of 'young vs old', and flattening the diversity of experiences between young people globally.

On the other hand, grappling with the experience of the pandemic has brought to the fore many features of the problem of generations that have

exercised the sociological imagination for a century, including the potential for tensions and collaboration between the generations, the difficulties expressed by modern societies in educating and socializing young people, and the potential emergence of a distinct form of generational consciousness. By applying a cautious and contextualized understanding of generations, we can gain some valuable insights into our current predicament: but this requires a clear understanding of what 'social generations' are, and what they are not.

The problem of generationalism

Many of the problems with the way the 'Covid generation' has been conceptualized reflect the influence of generationalism – 'the systematic appeal to the concept of generation in narrating the social and political' (White, 2013, p 216) – on contemporary public debate. Generationalism, or 'generationism' (Ryder, 1965), has long been a source of frustration to sociologists and others working with the concept, as they try to distinguish its contribution to understanding social change from the reductive ways in which it is often applied, and the divisive ends to which it can be put.

White (2013) reviews the development of generationalism as 'an emergent master-narrative on which actors of quite different persuasions converge as they seek to reshape prevalent conceptions of obligation, collective action and community' (p 217). Today's social problems, White argues, are frequently conceptualized as 'the problems of *generations*': in public debate over 'baby boomers' and the 'jilted generation', 'problems of debt, access to higher education, housing, pensions, and the health of the environment are all routinely denominated in age-aware terms' (White, 2013, p 216, emphasis in original). White's analysis draws on Bourdieu's (1991) sociology of categorization to show that the idea of generations in much political debate operates less as a 'concept of existence' (Nash, 1978) than as an instrument of social division. When, as White observes, generationalism becomes a 'leading register of political discourse' (White 2013, p 217), its divisive consequences are quick to manifest themselves in claims about inter-generational conflict.

Purhonen (2016) describes generationalism as 'a special form of historicism, by which generations are interpreted as collective actors and the succession of generations as the primary engine of history' (p 102). In overemphasizing the characteristics of different generations, this way of thinking results in 'mere caricatures', between which 'artificial confrontations' become instigated (Purhonen, 2016, p 102). This is the sentiment captured by the ubiquitous 'generation labels' that seem to operate as self-explanatory categories: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z. Such labels are widely understood as the cultural expression of 'social generations': cohorts of people who share an outlook shaped by the historical moment in which

they come of age, which both reflects and shapes the *Zeitgeist* and is often at odds with that of their elders.

'Social generations' were theorized by the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim, whose 1928 essay 'The problem of generations' (Mannheim, 1952) has 'often been described as the seminal theoretical treatment of generations as a sociological phenomenon' (Pilcher, 1994, p 481), from which '[m]odern empirical studies proceed' (Spitzer, 1973, p 1354). Written during the interwar period, when generational tensions were assuming an acute form in Europe, it attracted renewed scholarly interest and lively critique during later periods of political, cultural and demographic change, when the 'generation question' came to the fore: specifically, the periods following the Second World War and around the Millennium (Edmunds and Turner, 2005; Bristow, 2015). Yet as this insight has gained traction, it is often deployed in a reductive and deterministic fashion that misses the complex interactions at play in the emergence and expression of generational consciousness. Mannheim's essay is explored in depth later in this chapter.

The idea of 'social generations' speaks to an understanding of the relationship between historical events and individual biography: something that Mills (1970 [1952]) regards as a key feature of the sociological imagination. People who come of age within a particular historical moment share a formative encounter with the events of that time, which is distinct from that of older and younger generations. It is distinct not because the events themselves are different, or because they strike young adults in a uniform way, but because of the stage individuals are at in their own lives. Focusing on the emergence of distinct social generations who appear to be at odds with each other, however, misses crucial elements of Mannheim's understanding of cultural continuity and collaboration *between* generations, and divergences of outlook and experience *within* generations. In this regard, I contend that many of the difficulties identified with the concept of social generations stem from a reductive misreading of the original problem.

Current rhetoric about 'generational conflict' is underpinned by a deeper unease about the relationship between past, present and future: a temporal rupture, in which the past appears to offer at best an unhelpful guide to the future and at worst an obstructive barrier to the realization of historical progress. As discussed below, this is the problem at the heart of Mannheim's original essay, developed within the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim's theory has been subject to continuous development and critique. But while we should not treat his as the 'last word' on the sociological question of generations, a careful reading of the original 'problem of generations' reveals that it was, first and foremost, an attempt to counter the 'generationalism' of his times. Mannheim's emphasis on specificity and relativity means that he would have been horrified by many of the claims made about 'social generations' today.

A brief summary of the sociology of generations

In the current 'generation wars', social, economic, political, and cultural conflicts are played out in the form of *ideas about generations.* Ideas about generations have excited the imagination for millennia (Kriegel, 1978), and the chapters in this book reveal the cross-disciplinary reach of this powerful yet contested concept. Sociological theories of generations were developed in conversation and critique with insights from other disciplines, including philosophy, history, anthropology, literature and the biological sciences. The concept encapsulates a complex understanding of the interaction between nature, culture, knowledge, time and community. As Abrams (1970) explains, sociological generations deal with 'major redefinitions of whole cultures triggered by the reaction of particular age-groups within particular age spans to particular historical experiences; the convergence of individual time and social time; of age and history' (pp 183–4).

Given its complexity, it is not surprising that the concept of social generations has long proved controversial. Ryder's (1965) influential discussion of 'the cohort as a concept in social change' noted that '[m]any writers have used the succession of cohorts as the foundation for theories of sociocultural dynamics', leaping from 'inaccurate demographic observation to inaccurate social conclusion without supplying any intervening causality' (p 853). Forms of 'generationism' include a fixation on 'the biological fact of the succession of generations at thirty-year (father-son) intervals', believed to demonstrate a periodicity to socio-cultural change (p 853). One version of this naturalized, cyclical approach, whose adherents 'search for the regularities of the universal rhythm of generations' (Jaeger, 1985, pp 280–1), is associated with the writings of Ortega y Gasset (1923). Generally considered an 'outlandish' approach (Dobson, 1989, p 176), it has gained more recent influence via contributions from writers such as Strauss and Howe (1991, 1997), whose claim that generations can provide 'the history of America's future' imagines the concept in terms of a prophecy.

Another popular form of 'generationism' is the development of 'a conflict theory of change, pitched on the opposition between the younger and the older "generations" in society, as in the family'. But, as Ryder argues: 'The fact that social change produces intercohort differentiation and thus contributes to inter-generational conflict cannot justify a theory that social change is produced by that conflict' (Ryder 1965, p 853). The attribution of a wide range of complex social problems to differences in outlook between parents, children and grandchildren, on matters ranging from cultural values to educational norms to appropriate childrearing practices, remains a persistent theme in contemporary discussions of parenting culture and policy (Lee et al, 2014). Official attempts to resolve differences through the promotion of up-to-date, 'expert' advice and regulation lead, in practice,

to a further distancing of relations between the generations, as the values and practices of older generations become problematized as outdated and inappropriate (Bristow, 2016b; Furedi, 2021).

Kertzer's (1983) influential overview of 'generation as a sociological problem' suggests that generations can be understood in broadly four different (but sometimes overlapping) ways: kinship descent, cohort, life stage and historical period. Kinship descent, he argued, has a 'long tradition in social anthropology', where it refers 'not so much to parent–child relations as to the larger universe of kinship relations'. This sense of the term has also been used by demographers to develop measures for 'length of generation', where 'the interest is in population replacement, based on the reproduction of females'; and in studies of value transmission, social mobility, and immigration. In the cohort sense, ' "generation" refers to the succession of people moving through the age strata, the younger replacing the older as all age together'. Kertzer notes that the usage is 'widespread beyond sociology' and 'finds frequent expression in intellectual history, where, for example, "literary generations" may succeed one another each 10 or 15 years'. He also explains that 'the cohort notion of generation has extended beyond birth cohorts to apply to any succession through time' – referring, for example, to 'first, second or third "generations" of health behaviour studies' (Kertzer 1983, p 126).

The 'life stage' approach refers to 'such expressions as the "college generation"' – as in, for example, Sorokin's [1947] attribution of 'the conflict between "younger and older generations" to the differential response of people of different ages to the same events'. Eistenstadt's classic (1956) study *From Generation to Generation* combined the descent and life-stage meanings of generation (Kertzer, 1983, p 127). With regard to historical period, Kertzer argues that the use of the term 'generation' is 'less common in sociology than in history', where books bearing such titles as *The Generation of 1914* (Wohl, 1979) are 'numerous'. He explains:

> In this sense, 'generation' covers a wide range of cohorts. However, though it is the great historical event that defines such 'generations', they are often linked in practice to the cohorts of youths and young adults thought to be particularly influenced by such events. (Kertzer, 1983, p 127)

As Kertzer notes, '[t]hese meanings are all found in the sociological literature; indeed, many sociologists simultaneously use more than one' (Kertzer, 1983, p 126). For example, he notes that Mannheim's 'confounding of the genealogical meaning of "generation" with the cohort sense of the term' continues to be reflected in later research (p 127). In fact, as indicated in the discussion below, all of these uses of the concept of 'generation' are found in Mannheim's theory, which is what gives his essay its expansive

power – and accounts for many of the difficulties in applying his theory empirically (Pilcher, 1995).

Sociological theories of generation have developed in some important ways, as they attempt to theorize changing times. The uneasy socio-political context following the Second World War, and its eruption in the 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s (Marwick, 1999), resulted in an energetic and constructive debate about generational conflict that brought together discussions between the disciplines of sociology, psychology and history in a discussion about the dilemmas involved in integrating young people in a context of rapid social, economic, institutional and technological change (Erikson, 1963; Keniston and Lerner, 1971). From the 1980s onwards, debates about social policy and welfare reform highlighted the demographic pressures placed on societies in the Global North by ageing populations and low birth rates (Preston, 1984; Quadagno, 1990; Walker, 1996), while sociological understandings of 'the family' came to emphasize the emergence of more diverse and fluid family forms and practices (Morgan, 2011), in the context of social and cultural constructions of childhood and ageing, and the opportunities and challenges offered by economic and cultural globalization (Giddens, 1991, 1992; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Ruspini 2013).

A focus on generations has also led to critique, not least for the extent to which it can easily slide into a homogenizing 'generationalism'. As France and Roberts (2015) argue in their critique of 'the new emerging orthodoxy within youth studies', the one-sided application of 'the social generation paradigm' (p 215) tends to flatten out differences in young people's experience and distract scholarly and political attention from more significant sociological divisions. Globally, the application of Anglo-American constructs of 'generation' obscures differences between nations, cultures and societies in the meaning given to generations and the relations between them (Cole and Durham, 2007), and tends to gloss over generational tensions within other forms of identity and activism (Edmunds and Turner, 2002a; Henry, 2004).

The overuse and abuse of the concept of social generations has not only been challenged within youth studies. Researchers have also drawn attention to the problem of 'Boomer blaming': presenting the cohort born in the two decades following the Second World War as holding a universally 'selfish' set of values or attitudes that has 'taken' young people's future from them (Willetts, 2010) and allegedly sharing an existence of untrammelled privilege that makes them insensitive to the plight of today's young (Beckett, 2010; Howker and Malik, 2010; Gibney, 2017). Critics of Boomer-blaming draw attention to the ways in which such claims reflect wider demographic anxieties around population ageing and public spending, and present social, economic and political problems through a distorted generationalized lens (Phillipson et al, 2008; Bristow, 2015, 2016a, 2019, 2021a).

Arguably the biggest difficulty with making sense of social generations in the early 21st century is the contemporary sensibility around fragmented social time, and globalized social space. This is seen to be the product of a late modern 'risk society' (Giddens, 1991, 1992; Beck, 1992; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2000, 2011), in which boundaries and transitions have become increasingly blurred, and discourses of 'fluidity' sit uneasily alongside attempts to categorize and generalize (Furedi, 2020a). By the end of the 20th century, a naturalized focus on the 'life cycle' in discussions of generational continuity had been challenged by a more flexible, qualitative focus on the life course: an approach that 'introduced a dynamic dimension into the historical study of the family', moving 'analysis and interpretation from a simplistic examination of stages of the family cycle to an analysis of individuals' and families' timing of life transitions in relation to historical time' (Hareven, 2000, p 14). The emergence of the life course approach reflects the increasing fluidity of kinship relations and personal 'life stages' from the latter part of the 20th century, providing a more nuanced and reflexive approach to understanding the experience of growing up and ageing 'arising from the theme of transition and the centrality of cultural and historical contexts' (Pilcher, 1995, p 21).

The focus on life courses, like much contemporary sociological theory of family life, youth, and ageing, tends to emphasize qualitative experience and meaning. In this sense, it provides a challenge to functionalist analyses of life transitions that made an influential contribution to the study of generations, and particularly youth, in the mid-20th century (Eisenstadt, 1956, 1963, 1971), which focused on the question of how to integrate young people into the norms and roles of adult society. Leccardi and Ruspini (2016) write of the differences between debates about youth during much of the 20th century and those marked by 'more recent history', which 'is characterized by fragmentation, the outcome of the lack of a true centre from which conflicts may radiate'. They situate this in the context of 'the great processes of change in the last few decades – from de-industrialization to the rise in education levels, from the transformation of gender and family models to the de-standardization and precariousness of labour and the explosion of the political crisis'. One consequence of this has been 'a de-standardization and growing contingency in life-courses and identity', and a restructuring of intergenerational relations (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2016, pp 1–2).

As Leccardi and Ruspini write, the disruption to life-course patterns 'affects all generations, and creates new conditions of generalized uncertainty' (2016, p 2). This sense of temporal fragmentation is not, therefore, a condition of youth itself, but of the broader social and cultural circumstances of our contemporary 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). Leccardi elaborates: 'The crisis in industrial time brings with it a crisis in the "normal" biography that

constructs itself around this time: youth as preparation for work, adulthood as work performance, old age as retirement' (Leccardi, 2016, p 15).

In theorizing these changes, sociologists have developed non-linear biographical models such as 'the so-called *choice biography*', or 'risk biography', which are 'characterized by strong individualization' and 'connected to the need to make decisions in a social context characterized by great uncertainty' (Leccardi, 2016, p 17, emphasis in original).

The observation that disruption to life-course patterns affects all generations is shared by sociological literature on the social and cultural construction of ageing (Phillipson, 2013), and in work on the meaning of adulthood. For example, the historian Stephen Mintz (2015) acknowledges that the transition to adulthood has recently grown 'more protracted and problematic as acquisition of the traditional markers of adult identity – marriage, childbirth, and entry into a full-time career – are delayed into the late twenties' (p 68). However, as Mintz argues, a more significant change is the kind of adulthood that young people emerge into: not a stable identity, but a time of ongoing 'flux and mutability'. 'Instability, uncertainty, and a desire to grow, but not grow up and settle down, persist into adults' thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties,' he explains. 'A script that shaped expectations of adulthood through much of the twentieth century has unravelled' (pp 68–9). The emergence of new 'life stage' concepts, such as 'emerging adulthood' to denote 'the winding road from the late teens through the twenties' (Arnett, 2000, 2014), and the 'Third Age' to describe an active period between retirement from work and the dependency of 'old age' (Laslett, 1987), reflect these developments.

Yet, as Leccardi observes, '[t]hese new characteristics of social time and their reflections on the construction of biography reverberate directly on the condition of youth':

> By definition, youth has a dual connection to the time dimension not only because it is 'limited', destined inevitably to reach a conclusion, but also because young people are asked by society to delineate the course of their own biographical time, to build a meaningful relationship with social time. This means constructing significant connections between an individual and collective past, present and future (Cavalli, 1988). In this process, meaning is given to overall living time. (Leccardi 2016, pp15–16)

The relationship between past, present and future is central, both to the understanding of relations between generations, and the emergence of a shared consciousness within them. This was the problem that Mannheim grappled with back in the 1920s, during times that were quite different to our own, but raised no fewer challenges when it came to the problem of 'thinking generations' (White, 2013).

Revisiting Mannheim, a century on

The developments in the sociology of generations summarized above often take the form of a challenge, or corrective, to Mannheim's original theory of 'the problem of generations'. I suggest, however, that they can more fruitfully be regarded as an updating: in line with the specific historical moment in which we find ourselves, and in line with Mannheim's own appreciation of the dynamism of knowledge and its continual reconstruction. In Mannheim's theorization, a number of complex tensions are worked through, between: biology and culture in the transmission of ideas; individual and collective experience; the meanings developed *by* generations and the meanings attributed *to* them by wider society; continuity and change in the transmission of the cultural heritage. These are the very tensions that form the basis for subsequent critiques of, and confusions about, the 'social generations' concept, and the development of Mannheim's ideas a century on.

The 'problem of generations', for Mannheim, was not about the granular experiences of different age cohorts; or about the specific relationships between parents and children, and older people and younger people; or about particular 'youth' attitudes towards the topics of the day. Generations were about knowledge and meaning: how a society understands itself and its history, and how knowledge is constructed and reconstructed over time. He thus presented his theory of generations as the final in a collection of essays on the sociology of knowledge. As in his work on *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), Mannheim sought both to analyse 'the relationship between knowledge and existence' and 'to trace the forms that this relationship has taken in the development of mankind' (Mannheim, 1936, p 264) – a journey that led him to explore the ways in which different social groups, in different historical periods, came to understand their world (Wagner, 1952).

Mannheim's essay on generations combined critiques of, and insights from, both the 'positivist' and the 'historical-romantic' schools of sociological and philosophical thought. The former, he argued, regarded the succession of generations 'as something which articulated rather than broke the unilinear continuity of time', and saw the importance of generations in terms of 'one of the essential driving forces of progress'; while the latter regarded it 'as the problem of the existence of an interior time that cannot be measured but only experienced in purely qualitative terms' (Mannheim 1952, p 281). The question, for Mannheim, was how to understand the interaction between the qualitative experience of being born in a particular time and place, and the social and cultural meaning of generational change.

Being born into a generation, for Mannheim, was analogous to being born within a social class. Neither constituted a 'concrete group', which one chose to join, and both were closely tied to the circumstances of birth.

Crucially, however, class and generation are very different. Class position is socially constituted, 'based upon the existence of a changing economic and power structure in society', whereas generation location 'is based on the existence of biological rhythm in human existence – the factors of life and death, a limited span of life, and ageing' (Mannheim, 1952, p 290). Relations between members of the same generation – individuals born at the same time – are significant, as they have a 'common location in the historical dimension of the social process' (p 290). But relations between *different* generations are vital in ensuring cultural continuity, and these are not constituted by social dynamics alone:

> While the nature of class location can be explained in terms of economic and social conditions, generation location is determined by the way in which certain patterns of experience and thought tend to be brought into existence by the *natural data* of the transition from one generation to another. (Mannheim, 1952, p 292, emphasis in original)

By theorizing the significance of generations within the transmission and development of knowledge, Mannheim's contribution provided a framework for understanding the emergence of generational consciousness in relation to wider social and cultural events. The problem of generations was intimately related to the wider question of how knowledge is concretely situated, transmitted and developed. *What* we know about the world cannot be decoupled from *how* we come to know it: society's 'accumulated cultural heritage' is not something static that is merely passed down, but is continually transmitted to, and refreshed by, 'new participants in the cultural process', who make 'fresh contacts' with our society. People born at a particular point in history embody, and internalize, the experience of their time; but they do not do this in the same way as those who have come before them. Thus, consciousness is developed within, and informed by, the experience of coming of age in a particular time and place.

For Mannheim, the significance of generations lay in the interaction between 'new participants in the cultural process', and the society in which these participants are born and develop, and which they, in turn, transform. A group of people who have grown up with a particular idea about the way things are and why, will see things differently to those who come across this knowledge afresh. This is not because they happen to be older or younger, or different kinds of people – it is because of their location in an historical moment, and the wider social events of their time. Understanding generations requires appreciating both the features of their biological existence – the fact that we are always absorbing new members into our society – and their social experience, which is temporally distinct from that of their elders.

The continual emergence of new participants in society, who would make 'fresh contacts' with the existing wisdom and interpret it in their own ways, gives knowledge its dynamism and creativity. In passing on the cultural heritage, society was able to remember what it knew to be important – but equally important was the way that knowledge developed in this process enabled us to forget. Historical memory worked through generations of people to combine the power of accumulated wisdom with the 'up-to-dateness' of youth, enabling an 'elasticity of mind' that is able to provide continuity and engage with change, and compensate for 'the restricted and partial nature of the individual consciousness'. While generational change does result in a 'loss of accumulated cultural possessions', it also 'facilitates re-evaluation of our inventory and teaches us both to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to be won' (Mannheim, 1952, p 294). He contends that '[a]ll psychic and cultural data only really exist in so far as they are produced and reproduced in the present' (Mannheim 1952, p 295).

Mannheim's concern is with the transmission of the 'accumulated cultural heritage' both through 'conscious teaching' and, more importantly, informal mechanisms of generational interaction. He differentiates between 'two types of "fresh contact": one based on a shift in social relations, and the other on vital factors (the change from one generation to another)'. He argues: 'The latter type is *potentially* much more radical, since with the advent of the new participant in the process of culture, the change of attitude takes place in a different individual whose attitude towards the heritage handed down by his predecessors is a novel one' (Mannheim 1952, p 294, emphasis in original).

This experience has consequences for the individual, around the age (Mannheim suggested) of 17, when 'a quite visible and striking transformation of the consciousness of the individual in question takes place: a change, not merely in the content of experience, but in the individual's mental and spiritual adjustment to it' (Mannheim 1952, p 293). In this respect, it is worth noting Mannheim's insistence on the importance of approaching a sociological understanding of the human psyche, which is a development of his approach to understanding the relationship between knowledge and existence. Just as a narrowly positivistic approach to the cultural sciences fails to grasp the scope of cultural meaning, he considered that a narrowly empirical approach to human psychology – the 'functionalization and mechanization of psychic phenomena' – loses 'the unity of the mind as well as that of the person' (Mannheim, 1936, p 23).

As Ryder argued in 1965, one popular form of 'generationism' assumes that social conflicts arise from the friction between 'the younger and the older "generations" in society, as in the family' (p 853). Yet Mannheim regarded the friction between older and younger generations largely as a feature of intergenerational collaboration rather than conflict. The

relationship between the generations is continuous, spontaneous and often informal, and the fact that '[g]enerations are in a state of constant interaction' means that they develop a sensitivity to one another – 'not only does the teacher educate his pupil, but the pupil educates his teacher too' (p 301). Within the intimate relationships of the family, much of what young people know about the world is absorbed unconsciously: it is the way things are. As the young person matures and 'personal experimentation with life begins', they gain the possibility of 'really questioning and reflecting on things' (p 300).

A young person's coming of age, then, is the point at which tensions between the generations *potentially* come to the fore. Whether they erupt into something more significant, creating something that later theorists and commentators would describe as a 'generation gap', depends on wider social forces operating at that time, and the interaction between the pace of social change and the cohorts coming to maturity.

In explaining why the problem of generations should be considered as 'one of the indispensable guides to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual movements', Mannheim argued that 'its practical importance' lay in trying to gain 'a more exact understanding of the accelerated pace of social change' characteristic of the interwar period in which he was writing (Mannheim, 1952, p 287). In other words, analysis of the significance of generations, particularly when attending to questions of conflict, should be firmly grounded in its historical context. A distinctive generational consciousness does not arise simply from the passage of time, as is implied by current generationalist narratives of the difference in the ways that 'Millennials' and 'Generation Z' relate to social media, for example. Rather, it is the outcome of social and cultural conflict, when the knowledge and experience of the past comes starkly into tension with the present day.

'Generation as an actuality,' Mannheim argued, involves 'more than mere co-presence' at a particular time and place – it requires 'participation in the common destiny of this historical and social unit' (Mannheim, 1952, p 303). The conditions under which such 'actual' generations are formed arise 'only where a concrete bond is created between members of a generation by their being exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization'. The destabilization provoked by accelerated social change can result in a shared consciousness among those coming into adulthood, as young people lack the historical experience of older generations, meaning that they are 'dramatically aware of a process of de-stabilization and take sides in it'. It can also result in a schism between the generations, as 'the older generation cling to the re-orientation that had been the drama of *their* youth' (pp 300–1, emphasis in original). Conflict between generations, therefore, is both the product of a wider social and cultural conflict, and contributes to it.

Mannheim's identification of the conditions that give rise to the emergence of an 'actual generation' – the collision of wider forces in a period of accelerated change – form the basis of his understanding of 'social generations'. It is important, however, to distinguish between his account of 'actual generations', whose temporal and geographical circumstances provide the possibility for a shared generational consciousness, and the *form* of consciousness that is produced by members of that actual generation. As Woodman and Wyn (2015, p 8) explain, Mannheim's theory 'does not present a generation as a homogenous group of young people' – as is often claimed by critics within the field of youth studies. Rather, Mannheim argues that 'a generation is made up of sometimes radically different and potentially politically opposed "generational units"' – groups that 'react in different ways to the conditions of their times due to their different social positions' (Woodman and Wyn, 2015, p 8).

Noting that '[t]he generation unit represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such', Mannheim stresses the following point: '*Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units*' (Mannheim, 1952, p 304, emphasis in original).

His discussion of 'generation units' is an attempt to account for the particular form that generational consciousness might take. The experience of peers living through a tumultuous period will be heterogeneous; the *meaning* of that experience, the ways in which members of a generation 'work up the material of their common experiences', will depend on where they are located in social class and other divisions. Thus, for example, the young men who made up the 'Generation of 1914' shared the experience of the trenches, but they experienced different risks, problems and privileges. Disenchantment may have been the overriding theme of the times, as discussed further in the next chapter, but the bitter sense of betrayal articulated by the First World War poets was not shared by all of their peers. The fellow-feeling shared by this 'actual generation' was undercut by powerful ideologies, political allegiances and social differences that drew people of the same age in quite different directions.

Woodman and Wynn (2015) explain that generation units, a 'central element of Mannheim's framework', has tended to be overlooked by youth researchers, largely due to 'a conflation of continuity and inequality', in which 'the notion of generations was linked to an implicit and homogenising type of generationalism' (p 8). As discussed earlier in this chapter, we also see the distorting influence of generationalism in research and commentary that purports to endorse Mannheim's understanding of social generations but without either attending to the historical conditions that give rise

to 'generations of actuality' or allowing for the emergence of differential 'generation units'. This leads to crude claims about 'what Boomers believe' or 'what Millennials want'.

Woodman and Wyn suggest that 'one limitation' of Mannheim's theory is that '[h]is theorising tends to rest on the potential for a shared consciousness to emerge among some sections of a generation as a catalyst for political movements, neglecting other more mundane and affective forms of generational subjectivity' (2015, p 8). This problem of politicization derives, first of all, from a tendency to separate Mannheim's writing from its historical context – the very thing that his emphasis on 'social location' warned against. Individuals are located in a social class *and* a generation: one does not replace the other in importance, and each gives rise to a different dynamic regarding political outlook and action. The interwar period was a time of polarized class conflict, in which cultural conflicts were liable to translate into political sensibilities. Yet over the course of the 20th century, political movements became detached from their anchor in social class (Giddens, 1994; Wood, 1998) and tended to assume a more self-consciously cultural form. Class politics, which were rooted in economic interests, were gradually giving way to battles over cultural values, with youth styled as the agents of 'progressive', future-oriented change in contrast to the older generations, stereotyped as clinging onto the past (Bristow, 2015, 2019).

During the later part of the 20th century, ideas about 'social generations' gained popularity as an account of the expression of political agency that appears to be rooted in age, or generation, rather than social class. Around the turn of the century, Edmunds and Turner (2002b) drew on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to develop the idea of a 'strategic generation', which is 'generative of the conditions of thinking and action of subsequent cohorts. In Marxist terminology, it is a generation for-itself (as distinct from the passive "generation in-itself")' (Edmunds and Turner, 2002b, pp 17–18). Their suggestion is that when class no longer provides an obvious expression of agency – 'class for itself' – then the consciousness of generations can provide an alternative, in the form of a strategic 'generation for-itself' mobilizing its interests in the context of scarcity. In policy rhetoric, the idea of particular generations operating as 'strategic generations', using their demographic and cultural weight to influence policy in a direction that is favourable to their self-interest, and the claim that the main divide in politics is age or generation, has formed an important aspect of 'Boomer blaming' claimsmaking, which blames the Baby Boomer generation for creating conditions of 'generational inequity' in access to social and economic resources (Bristow, 2019).

Here, we again see the danger of generationalism, in the form of a homogenizing discourse that underplays important differences and intersections, including those of class, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location, and economic and social conflicts are (mis)represented as conflicts

between generations. It is worth noting that other scholars have developed Bourdieu's concept of habitus alongside the idea of social generations in quite a different direction, to include 'other more mundane and affective forms of generational subjectivity' (Woodman and Wyn, 2015, p 10), or to draw on wider elements of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction to challenge 'historicized' accounts that interpret of generations as 'collective actors' and 'the primary engine of history' (Purhonen, 2016).

We should therefore be wary of claims that view generations in terms of political movements and ideas. We should also treat with caution long-running attempts to associate whole cohorts with a particular outlook on cultural issues and values, which reflects the intersection of age and generation with other dynamics (Marwick, 1999; Bristow, 2015; Duffy, 2021). Duffy's (2021) study illustrates this with the example of the polarization shown by 'long-term generational trends on attitudes to abortion in the US', where, from the 1970s onwards, 'around half … of Americans have consistently said that a married woman should not be able to get a legal abortion just because she does not want more children', and over 40 per cent of 'Generation Z' still hold this view. Thus, '[t]he issue splits the country down the middle, regardless of generation'. National context is also significant: attitudes to abortion are 'entirely different' in Britain, where, with the exception of the very old, 'Pre-War generation', in 2016 only a quarter of the population say 'that a woman should not be allowed to have an abortion if she simply did not wish to have the child' (Duffy, 2021, p 181)

Attempts to 'globalize' a cohort's experience also raise some challenging questions. Writing in 1928, Mannheim emphasized the importance of geographical location in the development of any kind of generational consciousness. 'Young people in Prussia about 1800 did not share a common generation location with young people in China at the same period,' he argued. 'Membership in the same historical community … is the widest criterion of community of generation location', which takes specific forms in specific places (Mannheim, 1952, p 303). However, developments in culture and technology during the later 20th century prompted sociologists to discussed the potential for the emergence of a globalized generational consciousness. In this vein, Edmunds and Turner (2005) suggest that 'because the growth of global communications technology has enabled traumatic events, in an unparalleled way, to be experienced globally', the sociology of generations 'should develop the concept of global generations' (p 559).

There is an important insight here, particularly given the cultural diffusion of generationalist claims and identities from the late 20th century onwards; and the trend has doubtless been consolidated by the internet and social media (as shown by, for example, the rapid transatlantic diffusion of the 'Boomer Remover' meme, and its predecessor, 'OK Boomer') (Elliot, 2022). But discussions of 'global generations' tend to reproduce the problem of

homogenizing discourses, both in terms of the domination of the Global North perspective over other ways in which societies work up the meaning of their experiences and an implicit conflation of particular cultural expressions – such as the music of the 1960s or the social media memes of the 2020s – with the more grounded and nuanced ways in which people derive meaning from their lives.

Understanding the role that generations play in the transmission and reconstruction of knowledge therefore requires a nuanced analysis of the many other factors at play in this process. Mannheim's problem of generations relates not only to understanding of *how* generational consciousness is generated but understanding *why* the consciousness of one particular 'generation unit' comes to dominate. When we think about particular generations, such as the Generation of 1914, or the Baby Boomers, we are not thinking about the entire, diverse experience of a whole cohort but about the 'generation unit' that came to express the *Zeitgeist* of that changing time. From the First World War poets to the musicians of the 1960s counterculture, these expressions tend to reflect the antagonistic break from the 'old' captured by a section of that youthful elite. The 'voice of a generation' thus speaks to the temporal and cultural disruption undergone by a whole society, and the way that society goes on to process this experience. What defines that generation is not the common experience of all of its members but the way that a particular 'generation unit' has most clearly expressed and shaped the spirit of its age.

In this regard, understanding the meaning of generations also means understanding the influence of generationalism over cultural and political debates. Separating the concept of generation from the tendency towards generationalism can therefore be difficult, particularly in a context such as today, where generationalist thinking has become a 'leading register of political discourse' (White, 2013).

Conclusion: conceptualizing the 'Covid generation' in context

The influence of generationalist thinking, and the divisive ends to which it is often put, is why we should be wary of claims about the experiences of, and outcomes for, what is now routinely labelled the 'Covid generation'. This label, and its variations, has become ubiquitous in academic, media and policy discussions about the impact of the pandemic upon young people; but the question of what, and to whom, that label refers is difficult to discern. Does it mean all babies, children and young people alive during the pandemic, and if so where should be the cut-off point? Or does it refer more narrowly to the coming-of-age cohort previously badged 'Generation Z', for whom there has long been a search for a catchier tag? The pandemic was a global

phenomenon, to which different societies responded in different ways: so how generalizable is the term beyond (for example) the UK? Even if we can agree on a definition of the 'Covid generation', how do we account for the diversity of experiences and outcomes within that cohort – or draw clear distinctions with other cohorts, who also lived through the pandemic and feel shaped by it?

Predictions of dire outcomes for a global 'Covid generation', or the presentation of the pandemic response as something that was done to protect the old at the expense of the young, amount to simplistic determinism (Bristow and Gilland, 2020; Bristow, 2021b). Given the problems associated with 'the (mis)application of generations for making sense of uncertain times' (Rudolph and Zacher, 2020, p 139), it is tempting to focus sociological work on critiques of the concept of 'social generations', if not abandon it altogether. Yet claims that seek to strip the experience of the pandemic of its distinctive generational meaning, whether by falsely universalizing it ('we're all in it together'), or by dramatically individualizing it ('everyone had a different experience'), fail to acknowledge the significance of this historical moment for those coming into adulthood at this moment in time. It is here that 'social generations' come into their own.

For all the difficulties with the concept, a nuanced understanding of 'social generations' may have an important role to play in understanding our current historical moment, and its implications for the future. This is less to do with the experience of the pandemic itself than with the meaning that our societies have attributed to it, as an 'unprecedented' event requiring a decisive break from the social, economic, and cultural conventions that hitherto framed our social existence. It seems that the upheavals provoked by the pandemic were no mere historical 'blip', after which everything could return to 'normal': they represented part of a much wider process of accelerated social change, in which 'wider social forces' (Mannheim, 1952) would come forcefully into conflict, creating a schism between past and present.

The pandemic, and the globalized response of 'lockdowns', did not by itself cause this rupture. In many ways, these were the outcome of economic, social, political and international tensions that have been building for decades (Furedi, 2014; Mullan, 2020; Bauman, 2011). Yet at the same time, the extreme character of the social response, with its implications for national economies, education systems, health services, and established ways of life, consolidated and accelerated trends towards polarization and inequality. As the historian Toby Green, author of *The Covid Consensus: The new politics of global inequality*, argues, while much liberal-left discourse focused on the extent to which the pandemic has exposed existing inequalities, this has often failed to 'acknowledge the role of lockdowns in intensifying this process'. 'In truth', argues Green, 'the pandemic has exposed these inequalities in

much the same way that an earthquake exposes an existing crack in the earth and turns it into a chasm' (Green, 2021, p 28). We can perceive a similar trend with the cultural battles that are coming to define our present moment: fragmentation and polarization were apparent before Covid, but it now seems that a 'chasm' has now opened up between different perceptions of the world within communities.

Following Mannheim, we can surmise that this historical moment may well give rise to an 'actual generation', comprising a cohort who experienced 'the same concrete historical problems'. The events of 2020 and beyond represent a new epoch far more significant than the expressions of social change that have often previously been highlighted as the makings of a generation: the turn of the Millennium, for example, or the ubiquity of social media. The all-encompassing character of lockdowns and associated Covid-19 restrictions gave the crisis an intimate, personal quality that could not be ignored. The disruption of social time, and the upheaval of taken-for-granted ways of living and interacting, gave social distancing measures an intimate quality that impacted every dimension of life for a substantial period. This had distinctive implications for those coming of age, at the point where they were 'really questioning and reflecting on things' (Mannheim, 1952, p 300), who found that those rites of passage that had previously been considered all-important stages on the path to their personal futures simply disappeared, in a cloud of anxiety about the problem of the present. In particular, the closure of schools and universities as core institutions of education and socialization, followed by attempts to substitute 'online learning' of curriculum content, raised some profound questions about the value that contemporary 'risk society' places on the transmission of 'the accumulated cultural heritage' to the young.

Yet precisely because of the all-encompassing character of this moment, we should also heed Mannheim's insistence on the other factors that would lead members of this generation to '*work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways*', becoming separate generation units (Mannheim, 1952, p 304; emphasis in original). While this 'traumatic event' (Edmunds and Turner, 2005) may create the conditions for a distinctive generational consciousness, the meaning of this experience has a fragmented and atomized quality.

An uneasy tension has thus emerged between a globalized narrative that framed 'the Covid consensus' as a common threat requiring a standardized response, and the national, local, and personal circumstances that mitigated against the deeper adoption of any kind of consensus. For example, understanding that the pandemic was a global experience which provoked a particular global response could easily distract from a sensitivity to the contradictory dynamics at play. One paradox was that people's actual experience became parochial: travel restrictions within and between nations,

and the difference in legal detail between nations and even regions regarding, for example, the duration of school closures, or the imposition of curfews and other social distancing measures, means that it is difficult to argue robustly that any particular cohort, even within the same country, lived through the same kind of 'lockdown'.

Arguably the most significant feature of our moment lies in the symbolic rupture between the generations, as embodied representatives of past, present, and future, captured by the narrative of 'unprecedented' events, and the logic of 'social distancing'. As Furedi (2020b) notes in his discussion of 'social distancing, safe spaces and the demand for quarantine', social theorists have long held an interest in the phenomenon of social distance. Mannheim, back in the 1930s, suggested that social distance could signify both 'an external or spatial distance' or an 'internal or mental distance', and attended to the role played by fear in 'the evolution of mental distancing from spatial distance'. 'If I keep a safe space between myself and the stranger who is stronger than me, then, in this spatial distance between us there is contained the mental distance of fear,' he observed. Mannheim regarded distancing as 'one of the behaviour patterns which is essential to the persistence and continuity of an authoritarian civilisation', while democracy 'diminishes distances' (Mannheim 1957, pp 47–8). Furedi explains that in Western culture today, distancing has become more positively embraced, with the notion of 'safe spaces' speaking to an aspiration for 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991): 'the sense of order and continuity – in the face of uncertainty' (Furedi, 2020b, p 393).

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the Global North back in 2020, most acknowledged the necessity for some form of physical distancing between the generations: not least because of the age-based threat that the virus posed. Less anticipated was the extent to which this practical necessity would intersect with the longer-running construction of a mental distance between the generations, where the behaviours, conventions and knowledge associated with 'the past' were already held in question. As such, the promotion of this moment as an 'unprecedented' threat requiring an 'unprecedented' response dealt a symbolic blow to the transaction between the generations; how can older generations pass on what they know about life, when everything they know is deemed irrelevant to the current state of crisis? This is the question at the heart of discussions about the 'Covid generation', and one that will not be easily or rapidly resolved.

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3

Humanities and a Longer History of Social Generations

Helen Kingstone

Discussions of social generations need to take into account their long and non-linear history. Our present focus on intergenerational inequity (most prominently through the lens of 'Baby Boomers vs Millennials') disregards the much longer history of this phenomenon. As this chapter will show, social generations first emerged over 200 years ago, in the upheavals of the French Revolution and worldwide Napoleonic Wars. I examine the nature of generational affiliations and identities in the first century and a half of their emergence, to show how we got where we are now and how we need not take for granted the current conflict-based structure in which generations are persistently discussed today.

The 'generations' concept is complex partly because it is double-faceted. It points both diachronically and synchronically or – putting it in more visual terms – both vertically and laterally (Burnett, 2010, pp 1–2). Genealogical generations have long been recorded and celebrated (think of the Bible's listing of the generations that make Jesus a descendent of Abraham and King David, Matthew 1:1-17). This sense of the word relates to 'generation' of new life (Hopwood et al, 2018), and points up/down to other generations in a family (see Chapter 4 for more on the evolution of this term).

Over the past two centuries a second meaning has developed, which instead points laterally outwards, and refers to contemporaries in the same cohort strata. The concept of generations therefore has significance both within the family and across society. Generational categories typically are both defined in comparison to notional parents, and are highly historically specific. The familial meaning evokes the steady passing of time, whereas the newer cohort meaning implies a temporal rupture or break with the past. In practice, of course, everyone is situated in both a vertical sequence

of generations and a lateral stratum, and family relationships can be ones of rupture as well as continuity. Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) use individualized intergenerational tensions to illustrate what they see as broader cultural rupture between old and new. Ryder cautions, however, that 'The fact that social change produces intercohort differentiation and thus contributes to inter-generational conflict cannot justify a theory that social change is produced by that conflict' (Ryder, 1965, p 853). The first part of this chapter traces how the cohort meaning emerged, and how it took root in 19th-century Britain. The latter half showcases a 19th-century analysis – the novel *Hester* by Margaret Oliphant (2009 [1883]) – of what happens when age and generational identity misalign.

The origins of social generations

Although social generations came to focused attention in the 20th century, scholars' understanding needs to address a longer timeline (Kingstone, 2021). Karl Mannheim wrote his foundational theory of social generations in the aftermath of the First World War in Germany, but he rooted it in the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars of 1789 to 1815 (Mannheim, 1952 [1928]). It is perhaps understandable that scholars have primarily applied the concept to the post-1945 period: Mannheim's work was only translated into English in 1952; it was taken up primarily by the discipline of Sociology, which tends to focus on contemporary society; and it is easiest to identify generations using the demographic data only readily available from the 20th century onwards and/or by asking living people about their self-imputed identities. However, this chapter argues that while generations have probably never manifested quite as straightforwardly, universally or definitively as Mannheim arguably envisaged, we need to take them seriously as a concept and a social phenomenon across at least the past two centuries.

First and Second World War generations

Let's work backwards beyond the post-1945 Baby Boomer generation. The question of how social and genealogical generation interrelate has been foregrounded by the effects of the Holocaust or Shoah (Weigel, 2002). In order to understand the way that Holocaust trauma (and by implication other traumas) plays out among the children of survivors and how that mediated legacy manifests, Marianne Hirsch has built on Eva Hoffman's category of a 'postgeneration' (2004) to develop the influential concept of 'postmemory'. This captures the way that one generation's traumatic experiences can be transmitted to the next generation in highly mediated ways, which feel like memories but which are actually embedded in stories and photographs

(Hirsch, 2012, p 5). She writes candidly of the 'layering and belatedness' of her own memories in relation to those of her parents and 'the magnitude of my parents' recollections and the ways in which I felt crowded out by them' (Hirsch, 2012, pp 5, 4).

This has been a very fruitful concept for Memory Studies, partly for its foregrounding of the 'multigenerational self' that Williams elaborates on in Chapter 8, and for its recognition of the importance of visual media as well as verbal narratives. However, its applicability as a theory of transgenerational memory is limited by its focus on 'transmission', which implies a one-way relationship downwards within families, with a process that is somewhat passive and inescapable. Recent scholars have begun to suggest more reciprocal intersubjective dynamics, where two generations might renegotiate between them the meaning of those memories (Newby, 2020). This would also allow us to consider intergenerational dynamics not only within but beyond the family, reflecting on the relationship between social and familial generations.

People were already thinking generationally before the Second World War, with the concept brought into the foreground by the First World War. Memory Studies scholar Astrid Erll sees this as the 'foundational moment' for conscious generational identities (Erll, 2014). Over the subsequent interwar period, writers who had come of age during the conflict narrated how it had shaped, decimated and crippled them and their peers, such as in Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen Nichts Neues*, 1928), R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End* (1928) and Vera Brittain's autobiography *Testament of Youth* (1933). Reinforcing the famous image of the conflict as 'lions led by donkeys', they expressed their sense of an unbridgeable divide between their own front-line generation sacrificing its youth, and an older generation of complacent army commanders, mirrored in the older generations sheltering in comparative safety at home. They also expressed a second divide of incomprehension, in relation to the slightly younger generation, coming of age just after war's 1918 end, who turned away from it. Brittain, who served during the war as a volunteer nurse and then returned to her disrupted Oxford University degree in 1919, recounts in *Testament of Youth* how for the new generation of fresh-faced 18-year-old fellow students, 'I represented neither a respect-worthy volunteer in a national cause nor a surviving victim of history's cruellest catastrophe; I was merely a figure of fun, ludicrously boasting of her experiences in an already *démodé* conflict' (Brittain, 1978, p 493). She recalls with particular intensity her sense of alienation from this only slightly younger but starkly demarcated generation. This was the group whose poets and writers were later characterized by Samuel Hynes as *The Auden Generation* (1976): they had been schooled on military values but found the war over before they could prove their heroism and turned against it as a result (Hynes, 1976, pp

18–19). Even though the term 'generation gap' was not coined until the 1960s – to showcase the gulf in values between young Baby Boomers' and their parents – its dimensions were articulated in the First World War years.

The narrative of a lost First World War generation has persisted in the cultural memory, reinforced by historians' works such as Robert Wohl's *The Generation of 1914* (Wohl, 1979). Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) valuably analysed the myths in which participants made sense of their experiences, but in the process he 'did some myth-making of his own' by privileging the voices of youthful officers such as Robert Graves (b. 1895) and Wilfred Owen (b. 1893) (Brian, 2018, p 161). Overall, the soldiers killed in the First World War spanned a broader age spectrum than this acknowledges: army recruitment ultimately reached the ages of 41 in Britain, 43 in Russia, 48 in France and 50 in Austria-Hungary (Brian, 2018, p 152). Between 3 and 4 million women were widowed by the war, and 6–8 million children left fatherless: many of the war dead were married and had fathered children before the war (Winter, 1977). As Amanda Brian puts it, 'there remains a disconnect' between this scholarship and 'the persistent image of the First World War soldier as young and unattached' (pp 160–61). Winter pins down the reason for this disconnect, namely the disproportionately high number of deaths from young men in the social elite, since 'casualty rates among officers were higher than those among men in the ranks'. The officers' culturally influential accounts of the war cemented the 'lost generation' rhetoric, even though it applied more to their specific social stratum than to the population overall. As is so often the case, the experience of the social elite has become the overriding cultural memory.

19th-century generations

In 19th-century Britain, my primary area of study, people tended to define themselves less regularly through generational identity than through social strata (class) and segmentation (religious affiliation, geographical origin, economic sector). Those who did reflect on their generational location tended as above to be from educated social elites. Such writers, nonetheless, are worth studying because they reflected in nuanced and provocative ways on the workings of generations, arguably doing so in more creative and varied ways due to the lack of any single agreed definition. What is more, even in the absence of self-consciousness about it among wider social groups, we can arguably see generational effects shaping behaviour, culture and beliefs.

The French Revolutionary period saw commentators using the rhetoric of generational succession to support a range of divergent political agendas. Edmund Burke in 1790 memorably described the social contract as being one between 'those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born' (Burke, 1999, p 96). This rhetoric of continuity was vehemently

challenged from the 1790s onwards, as French Revolutionary radicals and reformers from Thomas Paine onwards imagined instead a dynamic of hostility between the living and the dead, and suggested that the traditions and precedents of past generations should give up their grim gothic clutch over current lives (McAllister, 2018, pp 26–7). In both cases, the generational category used is so broad as to be synonymous with the living population, rather than focusing specifically on groupings of birth cohorts. However, the French historian Pierre Nora has taken up the more precise ramifications of Mannheim's focus on the French Revolutionary period. As he points out, the revolutionaries themselves emerged from a tight cohort generation, with many of the most influential figures (including Maximilien Robespierre and Georges Danton) aged only 20–25 when the revolution broke out (Nora, 1996, p 502). Among this small coterie, at least, a Mannheimian 'generation unit' can be seen in action.

Early and mid-19th-century Britain were shaped by the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, not least by the baby boom that took place in the years after the war's 1815 end. McAllister argues for the significance of this, as a demographic bulge grew into adulthood and the UK birth rate then slowed, producing a relatively 'top-heavy' population pyramid of the sort we see as new to the 21st century. As a result, life-course categories that we now see as familiar, particularly mid-life disappointment, 'may have emerged with particular force and frequency in mid-Victorian Britain' (McAllister, 2021). Charles Dickens evocatively depicts this phenomenon in much of his late fiction (including *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*), through 'a new surplus of middle-aged and older Victorians', leaving 'more men waiting patiently in junior positions […] regretting their failure to advance in life and wondering where, for them, it had all gone wrong' (McAllister, 2021). This analysis reminds us that experiences that shape social generations can also occur at life-stages other than Mannheim's so-called 'formative period'.

There is also a wealth of scholarship from historians and literary scholars on familial dynamics, and on ageing, in 19th and early-20th century Britain. This has enabled us to look beyond the marriage plotlines of many Victorian novels to recognize the variation within 19th-century marriage (Schaffer, 2016), and to acknowledge the equivalent importance of extended 'family ties' (Nelson, 2007) and of siblings (Davidoff, 2012). Others have probed the damaging ideals of masculinity that pushed fathers into the distant and disciplinarian persona (Tosh, 2007; Sanders, 2009); Laura King has further explored how fathers in the first half of the 20th century navigated changing expectations of their roles (King, 2015). The social transformations of the 19th century also brought about a changed environment for ageing (Thane, 2000; Chase, 2009; Heath, 2009). Botelho and Thane delineate how we evaluate age based on 'chronological' age, 'functional' assessment of physical ability, and 'cultural old age', meaning that it varies through history

(Botelho and Thane, 2000; Thane, 2000). For example, before the Industrial Revolution, a man's prime was seen (following Aristotle) as beginning at 50, but urbanization, taking paid labour out of the home, tied ideas of manliness to those of work and meant less employment for older people (Heath, 2009). As a result, although the numbers involved are far greater now, anxiety about 'the ageing society' is far from new in the 21st century.

Even further back beyond Mannheim's putative French-Revolutionary starting-point, scholars are now carving out generational frameworks. Barbara Crosbie has recently investigated 'age relations and cultural change' in northern England of the 1740s–70s. She uses this localized geographical field, and non-standard periodization, to go beyond polarized views of the 18th century as being either a time *before* modernity, or a time *of* modernity (Crosbie, 2020, p 3). She traces, for instance, the transition from an 'atrophied' early-modern apprenticeship system to a 'new form of youth employment' and overall sees evidence among these groups, once they reach adulthood, of 'self-aware generational cohorts' (Crosbie, 2020, pp 14, 16). Overall, she identifies a 'significant relocation of cultural capital from those who possessed the authority of age to those that held the key to the future' (p 242). Her study does not seek, however, to delineate why her chosen decennial cohort, 'children of the 1740s', might (or might not) have coherence as a social generation: in other words, what demarcates them from children two or three years older or younger, and why would the social and cultural change line up so neatly with the birth decade?

One way of dealing with this is to narrow our gaze to a single-year birth cohort, to try to ascertain what commonalities we can find at this granular level. In a recent collaborative project that Trev Broughton and I co-led, we examined the cohort of Queen Victoria's exact contemporaries, who were all born in 1819 and who thus had bicentenaries in 2019 (Kingstone and Broughton, 2019a, 2019b). We found some notable expressions of generational consciousness among this cohort. The great novelist George Eliot (pen name of Marian Evans; 1819–80) resisted identification with the mass of her peers as she fled from the predictable generational sequence of 'provincial life' to 'upwards mobility in a cosmopolitan [London] literary world' (Livesey, 2019, p 288). However, Eliot went on to depict the past world of her childhood repeatedly in her novels, most famously *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871–72), showing how preoccupied she was with the enormity of the changes that had taken place during her lifetime. What is more, she shared this sense of rupture (and fascination with a recent but lost past) with many of her contemporaries. This was the generation who most painfully experienced crises of religious faith. Another contemporary, James Anthony Froude (1818–94), wrote in his later years that 'the present [that is, younger] generation, which has grown up in an open spiritual ocean, […] will never know what it was to find the lights all

drifting, the compasses all awry, and nothing left to steer by except the stars' (cited in Hewitt, 2019, p 437). He presents his own generation as distinctive in being brought up in stability and thrown into uncertainty. He startlingly suggests that it might be easier for the generation born into, and accustomed to, pre-existing instability.

Generational consciousness was declaimed by various intellectual, artistic and creative movements throughout the 19th century. The most celebrated British Romantic writers emerged in two distinct generations: the first came of age with the French Revolution, the second 20–25 years later. When first-generation Romantic poet William Wordsworth says of the revolution that 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,' equally important is the next line: 'And to be young was very heaven.' Many artistic movements in the 19th century were conceived as brotherhoods of close contemporaries. These rejected the long-standing model of paternalistic transmission epitomized in apprenticeship and saw themselves in direct challenge to (and competition with) their establishment elders: the best-known of these in Britain is the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded in 1848 (see (Flower MacCannell, 1991; Morowitz and Vaughan, 2000; Myrone, 2019). Later in the century, the Spanish modernist literary 'Generation of [18]98' had their youth shaped by the Spanish–American War, though it was 15 years later before the group took on this historically marked label.

While generational consciousness does seem to have been deep-rooted among certain 19th-century intellectuals, it was not necessarily widespread in its reach across the social spectrum. Class and economic considerations remained the most prominent factor in social movements, such as the 1810s Luddite movement among skilled artisan weavers against the imposition of industrial machinery that challenged their livelihoods, or the 1840s Chartist movement among industrialized working-class men for political and electoral rights. The women's movement in the latter part of the 19th century, campaigning among other things for women's suffrage (voting rights), was focused by sex and its membership was similarly not centred on any one generation.

Markers of age and maturation also varied greatly across the classes. Civil registration of births only came into force incrementally across the United Kingdom (the practice began in England and Wales in 1837 but only became compulsory from 1875; in Scotland it began in 1855, in Ireland 1864), so among Queen Victoria's contemporaries, a notable proportion of people never knew their precise age. Among the working-class majority, who entered the labour economy at a younger age than the middle-class intellectuals discussed above, the 'formative' coming-of-age period might not happen at Mannheim's projected age of around 17. For parents trapped in severe poverty who were obliged to use their children's labour capacity to help produce goods for sale (as Henry Mayhew describes in his *London*

Labour and the London Poor, 1851–52), there may have been no clear distinction between childhood and age of responsibility. For others, coming of age may have been determined by other factors. We can gain rare insights into one such working-class life from the autobiography of a very different contemporary of Queen Victoria, cabinet-maker James Hopkinson (1819–94). He describes how in his teens, his place in a generational hierarchy was determined by seniority. When he entered into an apprenticeship aged 16, as the youngest of the lot, he was given the most menial tasks, but after eight months 'a younger one came at which I was very glad'. The other key marker of maturity for him was that under the terms of his apprenticeship he must 'abstain from Matrimony until I was 21', so as this birthday approached, his peers often teased him about his impending ability to become '*a full blown man*' (Hopkinson, 1968, pp 30, 21, 57, qtd Broughton, 2019, p 420). Throughout Hopkinson's autobiography, his relative place among his fellow workmen, and his ability to secure a sexual and familial identity, are more significant than any society-wide generational identity.

Nonetheless, cohort effects and generational patterning can perhaps exist even without explicit generation-consciousness. If so, we can gain useful insights from applying generational taxonomies to the 19th century. Martin Hewitt suggests that we can see generational patterning in the way that Darwinism took hold from 1859 onwards (Hewitt, 2024). Darwin's theory of evolution drew on existing ideas but combined them in a new and shockingly impersonal mechanism of 'natural selection'. Hewitt shows that rather than people gradually becoming reconciled to this theory, responses quickly crystallized along generational lines. People born before 1830, who were already past their 'formative period' when *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was published, did not or could not overhaul their worldview. Those currently in their adult prime, including the born-1819 cohort, were daunted but felt an obligation to engage, and a 'rising generation' of those under 30 years old became Darwinism's most zealous proponents. Public opinion only shifted as the generation for whom Darwin's ideas were formative rose to prominence. The 'paradigm shift' (Kuhn, 1962) to Darwinism may have taken place not through the changing of minds but through gradual generational supersession.

Current humanities scholarship is taking social generations seriously at last, after a period in which they were buried under the intersecting weight first of class, and more recently race and gender. A new article by digital humanities scholars Ted Underwood and Wenyi Shang, and social scientists Stephen Vaisey and Kevin Kiley (2022), makes the bold argument that, as the title has it, 'Cohort succession explains most change in literary culture' (Underwood et al, 2022). While the 'most' referred to is a modest 54.7 per cent, their statistical research, based on topic modelling of keywords, suggests that birthdate has a far greater significance on literary styles than

has hitherto been acknowledged and is more important than age or period. Historicist literary studies currently place emphasis on the context of the date when a literary work was written or published in order to understand its meaning and implications. However, according to Underwood et al's findings, we should be attending at least as closely to the date when a writer was born. That study used narrow birth-year cohorts as its units of analysis; in future work, Hewitt and I plan to examine how measurable change might cluster together across generational-length periods. As Erll herself argues, '"Generation" deserves to be put on the agenda of a "new" literary history' (Erll, 2014, p 385).

Age, generation and intergenerational dynamics in a Victorian novel

I now turn to showcase a novel that examines the intersection of familial and social generations, and show that simplistic age categories of 'young' and 'old' would fail to capture the generational nuances within each. Margaret Oliphant's *Hester* (1883) is set back in time first to the 1820s and then the 1860s, and depicts two successive generational moments, in which young people have to rise to the challenge to rescue their community. It acutely demonstrates the pitfalls of eliding age with generation. More positively, it also showcases intergenerational friendships that break out of genealogical imperatives to build relationships beyond families.

The novel opens with a vision of unbroken continuity, describing the fictional 'Vernon's bank' which in its small English town 'had risen to its height of fame under John Vernon, the grandfather of the present head of the firm, though it had existed for two or three generations before him' (Oliphant, 2009, p 5). We do not remain in this nominal 'present' for long, as by the end of the opening paragraph we have segued to 'his son after him', and then to *his* sons, who suddenly break this chain of patrilineal trans-generational transmission. One 'died young', the other 'went wrong', and in true fairy-tale style, this going wrong seems to set his descendants on a cursed course of similar wrongness (Oliphant, 2009, pp 5–6). That son's son (another John) 'began to go badly' by spending too much, and he causes a run on the bank from which he flees abroad, leaving his cousin Catherine Vernon to face the crisis instead. She does so admirably and saves the bank from ruin, going on to take her male cousin's place as de facto overseer of the bank and gaining a lifelong vocation in the process. After these opening chapters, for the remainder of the novel we leap forwards 40 years, to meet a new generation of Vernon cousins: two distantly descended young men who have been given charge of the bank in Catherine's retirement, and the daughter of the John who almost ruined the bank, who is our eponymous Hester.

This shift from trans-generational continuity to inter-generational rupture echoes experiences both in Oliphant's own life and in the era she lived through. She herself was no stranger to unexpected generational role reversal: this prolific novelist (1828–97) was obliged to turn to writing intensively to make a living after she was widowed as a young mother, and all three of her children who survived past infancy nonetheless predeceased her. The ruptures we see both in her life and her fiction echo in miniature one of the central characteristics that 19th-century commentators saw in their era. This was a sense of unprecedented break with the past, propelled by the late-18th-century Age of Revolutions, the worldwide Napoleonic Wars, the Industrial Revolution that began first in Britain, and increasing colonialized globalization. When we see ourselves in a 21st century of unprecedented change and challenges, it is worth remembering that people in the 19th century felt so too. As a result, Oliphant was by no means alone in reflecting on the rapid pace of change, or in using retrospective fiction to do it: so-called 'novels of the recent past' were widespread among Victorian fiction (Kingstone, 2017). Various canonical novels that are now better known for other attributes, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861), and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–2), were all set back in time by a few decades, enabling their authors to comment on the nature of the gap between past setting and readerly present. These novels segue between critiquing the intervening transformations that had taken place in society, and implying that certain things are cyclical and even perpetual – and Oliphant's *Hester* is no exception.

Age and generation

Throughout the novel, Oliphant resists easy age categories, especially binaries. As we move to a new time period 40 years after the opening, we are told that 'Catherine Vernon had become an old woman – at least she was sixty-five; you can call that an old woman if you please' (Oliphant, 2009, p 23). Oliphant is highly conscious of the generational differences within the sweeping category of 'old'. For Catherine, going to visit her fond elderly godparents, 'it still gave her a certain amusement to think that she was old like these old people', 'and yet it was true; for though sixty-five and eighty-five are very different, nobody can doubt that sixty-five is old. It was still strange, almost ludicrous, to Catherine, that it should be so' (Oliphant, 2009, p 83). Both of these two distinct generations are now labelled 'old' by their neighbours, even though one pair stands in a parental relation to the other. Oliphant seizes this chance to remind her readers that people's self-perceptions do not necessarily match those imposed from outside. Terms like 'old' have been imprecisely precise long before our new hundred-year life expectancies (Christensen et al, 2009).

The novel also exposes the way that age-definition is used to patronize and homogenize: from her perspective as matriarchal benefactor, Catherine says of three financially dependent neighbours that 'the dear old ladies want something to amuse them', even though they 'were all younger than [her], and one of them a man' (Oliphant, 2009, pp 127–8). 'Dear old ladies' has clearly long been a reductive diminutive that disregards the differences between people (in this case, the individuals in question are actually catty and disliked rather than 'dear'). This Victorian novel thus shows us that our ageing society's failure to distinguish effectively between different generations within the 'older' population is nothing new, and that it has always had damaging social effects.

Intergenerational dynamics

So what can be done about this mis-categorization and misunderstanding? Initially, the novel is fairly negative about the chances of intergenerational understanding. Oliphant emphasizes a whole plethora of generation gaps, especially between parents and children. The reckless John Vernon was very different from his grandfather and great-grandfather, who we never meet but are told of their probity and dedication. Catherine's mother tried to persuade her to marry that cousin John, 'But what is the use of a mother's remonstrances? The new generation will please itself and take its way' (Oliphant, 2009, p 6). Hester's own feather-brained mother does not understand her daughter's aspirations and restlessness, and nor do most of their elderly neighbours, who are fellow financial dependants. But as gradually becomes clear, these clashes are more often driven by imbalance of power than by age or generational differences. The 'dear old ladies' referenced earlier are all resentful at their state of dependency, and their benefactor, Catherine, is aloof and disdainful (even contemptuous) because of it.

Catherine's aloof disdain has its most damaging consequences on her otherwise potentially vibrant relationship with her cousin's daughter, Hester. This novel's two heroines long misunderstand each other. Eventually, they are brought together by a second banking crisis and come to realize that they are each other's mirror image after all. In the moment of calamity they face one another alone, 'both very pale, with eyes that shone with excitement and passion. The likeness between them came out in the strangest way as they stood thus, intent upon each other. They were like mother and daughter standing opposed in civil war.' And eventually Catherine concedes that ' "I think you and I have hated each other because we were meant to love each other, child." "I think I have always done both," said Hester' (Oliphant, 2009, p 442). Both kinship and kindred spirithood eventually triumph over resentment and inequity.

The novel also critiques what we might now call 'generation gaps' that are rooted in age difference, implying that no generation is sufficient by itself. When the most frivolous female Vernon cousin organizes a series of dance parties, she refuses to invite anyone but young people, so the few chaperones who attend are bored and isolated. As the narrator recounts, 'All was youth, rampant, insolent, careless – feeling that the world was made for it, and rejoicing to shake itself free of every trammel' (Oliphant, 2009, p 218). This mono-generational group, careless of the lessons of the past and reckless as a result, does not spot the clues that trouble is brewing, and that the family bank which supports their whole social edifice is being threatened from within and could lead to financial ruin for all of them.

The way out of this blinkered mono-generationality is intergenerational communication and understanding. The novel depicts an intergenerational friendship between Hester and the 85-year-old Captain Morgan that involves joint daily walks and evenings spent at the fireside of him and his wife. The young girl brings joy to the older couple, and the older people give her support and advice. The more petty and status-obsessed neighbours frown on this friendship – less from age than from class differential – but 'when Hester did that which so horrified the other neighbours, old Mrs Morgan [the Captain's wife] looked out after them from the window and saw the tall slim girl walking by the side of the stooping old man, with a pure delight that brought the tears to her eyes' (Oliphant, 2009, p 78).

This intergenerational friendship is sometimes envisaged in familial terms, as characters use the terminology of 'vertical generations' to fit this unconventional relationship into recognized categories. There is a grandparental dynamic between Hester and Captain Morgan, and his wife once accidentally describes him to Hester as 'your grandfather'. Her embarrassed apology for this slip admits a more dangerous possibility: that he will become her grandfather-in-law, if Hester persists in her unspoken would-be romance with their grandson, the chronically flirtatious Roland Ashton. The grandparents disapprove of him and his similarly superficial sister, and Captain Morgan in particular reveals a shocking lack of parental or paternal feeling for his grandchildren, born of a disreputable father who was possibly neglectful or abusive. At one point, Captain Morgan declares of these grandchildren: 'I have shaken off my old burdens. I don't take any more responsibility for those who – used to belong to me. They don't belong to me any longer' (Oliphant, 2009, p 149). He explains this partly through a sense of alienation from his grandchildren that he expresses as an unnatural swapping of age and chronology. He asks:

> Supposing that they have drained all that was best in me out of me for years? […] Supposing that they have grown alien to me in every respect – thinking other thoughts, walking in other ways? And that

> they are as old and more worldly than I am – older, less open to any influence of nature – am I to go treating these old rigid commonplace people as if they were my children still, and breaking my heart about them? No; no. (Oliphant, 2009, p 150)

He says all this before we ever meet his grandchildren, but once they come to visit they unfortunately prove to be frivolous, short-sighted and self-centred. It is difficult to know whether that might have been different if they had received more input and support from their grandparents after their mother's early death. While carefully refraining from moral judgement on this, Oliphant makes us think about the relative weight that should be accorded to familial or social intergenerational responsibility. Should our most important intergenerational relationships always be with those in our own family, and (as many current children of older parents with dementia are facing), might non-family sometimes be better placed to provide much-needed care?

In contrast to this difficult familial dynamic, the intergenerational friendship between Hester and Captain Morgan is reciprocal in its mutual benefit. She makes the retired sea-captain feel young again, and he gives her (living a secluded, geographically confined and routine-bound life) glimpses into other worlds, both in generational and gendered terms. He relates how 'He had been in some of the old sea-fights of the heroic days – at Trafalgar', 'how he had subdued a threatening mutiny' and survived 'great storms and fights' (Oliphant, 2009, p 78). Our narrator asks rhetorically, channelling Hester's own voice: 'Why was not Hester born in that day? Why was not she a man?' The narrator then adds: 'But she did not sufficiently realize that when the men were going through these perils, the mothers and sisters were trembling at home, able to do no more than she could' (Oliphant, 2009, p 79). This final line reminds us that it is gender, not generational location, that is the real limitation on Hester's life. Although she does ultimately help save the bank from a second crisis, she can tell no one of her part in it, and ends no more free than she began, bereft of the (unworthy) man she loved and being wooed by two uninspiring ones. The novel ends with a wry comment from the narrator:

> And as for Hester, all that can be said for her is that there are two men whom she may choose between, and marry either if she please – good men both, who will never wring her heart. [...] What can a young woman desire more than to have such a possibility of choice? (Oliphant, 2009, p 456)

The novel has worked hard to show us that a woman – whether young or old – can desire a great deal more from life than this. Although Victorian

novels condition us to expect marriage plots, in this story, intergenerational friendships are represented as much more mutually fulfilling, mind-expanding, and potentially transformative.

Conclusion

Patterns of social generations, and concern about age and generational misalignment, were thus both recognizably present in 19th-century life, at least as it was expressed in intellectual and literary culture. Far from only being a concern only of the 20th or 21st centuries, 'generation gaps' and conflicts are visible in societies undergoing upheaval from the Industrial Revolution onwards. Writers often describe this as an experience of dislocation and as a struggle to find a sense of belonging, but it also clearly served as a source of energy and drive, fuelling literature by Romantic-era poets, novelist George Eliot, First World War memoirs and interwar poetry among others.

The analysis of *Hester* here shows that perceptive individuals have long recognized the damaging effects of homogenizing older populations, In Oliphant's Victorian novel, she critiques the presumption that ageing is a negative process that diminishes people. Oliphant shows that the facile view of old age as a binary category (an inversion of youth) is profoundly unhelpful in any society where longevity brings a range of people into its umbrella category. The multi-layered concept of generations brings much needed nuance, as the simultaneously old Catherine (aged 65) and her generationally distinct godparents (aged 85) show us two very different sides to the 'old age' category. These fine distinctions within the category also significantly expose the ways that old-age discourse is used to belittle and patronize, as characters label each other as old in order to dismiss the other's opinions or practices as outdated. The novel shows what a flawed – and often back-firing – approach this is.

Oliphant also highlights the damaging effects of blocks to intergenerational communication, making now the long-overdue time to tackle these prevalent issues. She suggests that reduced reliance on one's linear relations, and stronger, more reciprocal communication across generations beyond the family could alleviate both emotional isolation and practical vulnerability. Intergenerational dynamics need to move beyond assumptions of conflict or rupture, and Hester's intergenerational friendship with Captain Morgan provides an inspirational model that the rest of society would do well to emulate.

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4

The Concept of Generation in Biology and Medicine

Tatjana Buklijas

The term *generation* originally stood for *procreation*: the (momentous) act of creating a new being out of paternal and maternal contribution under the influence of the procreative environment (Hopwood, 2009). Prior to the 18th century, wrote the French biologist François Jacob, living organisms did not *reproduce* – they were *engendered* in the act of *generation*, always a unique, isolated event (Hopwood, 2018, p 288). In the context of genealogy, *generation* also carried a metaphorical meaning: it described the number of successive procreative acts in a line of descent (Parnes, Vedder and Willer, 2008). But with the emergence of the novel concept of *heredity*, as a material entity that determined the characteristics of the organism and that was passed across generations akin to legal inheritance, the term *generation* was increasingly replaced with the term *reproduction* (López-Beltran, 1994). The new term highlighted *re-production*, or copying, of the ancestral traits, in contrast to the unpredictable, unique, and divine nature of procreation.

Yet the term *generation* did not disappear. Rather, it launched a new career, as it began to stand for a collective (of humans, or other organisms) born around the same time (Parnes et al, 2008). Generations could denote groups within families but more often they referred to individuals born around the same time. Indeed, the notion of *generation* incorporated 'historical time', a novel concept around 1800, which stood at the centre of new ways to understand the world (Wülfingen et al, 2015). The older, static approach, concerned with collecting, describing and classifying the objects of natural history created by God, did not see nature in terms of temporal change; but from around 1800 a series of methodological approaches that then became new disciplines concerned with change across

time emerged: history, geology, embryology and evolutionary science, to name just some.

This temporal view of the world extended to the explanations of contemporary society through the 19th century. With an increased social mobility in the age of revolutions and rapid technological change loosening the ties with parents, the communities of contemporaries came together on the basis of shared experiences and outlooks. The capacious definition of *generation* allowed different disciplines to appropriate the concept in various ways. At the same time as biologists (Carl Nägeli, Gregor Mendel) articulated a new idea of biological reproduction through generations, political philosophers such as Auguste Comte and Karl Marx envisaged human society as a succession of generations and writers (e.g. Ivan Turgenev in his *Fathers and Sons*) described the growing political and cultural schisms through accounts of generational conflicts (Parnes et al, 2008, pp 203–17).

The career of the term *generation* in social sciences of the early-to-mid 20th century is well described. In the 1920s, the sociologist Karl Mannheim published his now-famous essay 'The problem of generations', a systematic consideration of the issue of generations in the human society (Mannheim, 1952 [1928]). Mannheim argued that people in the formative age of youth and adolescence are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environment. This strong and lasting influence, based on the shared experience, produced the social phenomena of generations.

Karl Mannheim's work had enormous influence on thinking about societies, including the work of scholars across many disciplines (White, 2013). Many chapters in this volume demonstrate the continued strength of generational thinking across humanities and social sciences as well as broader culture. In this chapter I focus on a less examined aspect of 'generational thinking': the ways in which human biological and medical sciences, as well as social sciences that heavily drew on medical concepts – such as the fields of social work and social psychology – used the term *generation*. While there is excellent historical scholarship examining the turn from generation to reproduction and the career of *generation* in the 19th century (for example, Hopwood, 2018; Parnes et al, 2008), there is far less on the concept of generation in sciences over the past hundred years. This chapter is an attempt to write this history: a selection of cases and stories that captures, in my view, the most significant developments and transformations. I pay particular attention to the adjectives *intergenerational* and *transgenerational*, which, I argue, allowed scholars, physicians, social workers and other interested people to describe the recurrence of phenomena that could not be explained using the concepts and methods of the dominant science of heredity, genetics. By using these terms, these 20th-century scholars, social workers, clinicians and activists brought together the new, horizontal

meaning with the older one, which united procreation, procreative environment and lineage.

The chapter consists of three main sections, alongside the introduction and conclusion. In the first, I will briefly examine the terminology that scientists and social workers used to describe the recurrence of phenomena such as addiction or mental health problems in families through the first half of the 20th century, at the time when heredity became synonymous with genetics. Developed during the heyday of eugenics, a broad set of ideas proposing the use of science to improve the 'quality' of human population, the terms *social problem group* and *problem families* captured these non-genetic yet recurrent issues of medical and social importance. In the aftermath of the Second World War, as I show in the second section, the public support for eugenics weakened. The increasingly popular language of *generations* was used both for what used to be termed *problem families* but also to describe the lasting trauma of the Second World War, especially the second generation of the Holocaust survivors.

Psychoanalytic psychiatrists and psychoanalytically trained social workers played a key role in the development and propagation of these concepts. Descendants of ethnic and other groups, and especially Indigenous peoples in former settler colonies, who had suffered colonization, genocide and violence, picked up on the language of intergenerational trauma to make sense of the burden of trauma they had experienced growing up in families oppressed by painful memories and stories, and strengthen political arguments for recognition, reparations and sovereignty. In this work the procreative link was weakened to make room for the shared 'cohort' experiences. But by the 1980s, biological psychiatry, which sought to explain mental illness as a consequence of the disruption of the biological functions in the brain, began to replace psychoanalysis as the dominant intellectual trend. The third section investigates how the question of the cause and mechanism of the intergenerational trauma became part of a broader reconsideration of the nature of heredity that reintroduced environmental influence back into the picture. Heredity could now be not just genetic but also intergenerational and transgenerational heredity, persisting for two, three or more generations. Under the guise of the new science of epigenetics, the 'old' meaning of *generation-as-procreation* was revived again.

'Social problem group' and 'problem families' in the era of eugenics, c. 1900 to 1940s

While the notion of material heredity was introduced in the early 19th century, its nature, susceptibility to environmental change, as well as the laws and mechanisms of its transmission, remained open for debate for decades (López-Beltran, 1994; Müller-Wille and Rheinberger, 2007). In the early 1900s a new discipline with a mission of explaining the distribution of

hereditary material across generations was named *genetics*, but the extent to which hereditary material – the nature of which was unknown – was susceptible to environmental modifications remained open for a few more decades (Sapp, 1987; Burian et al, 1988; Graham, 2016; Buklijas, 2018). Yet by around the 1930s the consensus was created that the stability of the hereditary material transmitted across the generations was the key criterion for true biological inheritance. In short, only genes counted.

The relationship between this new, experimental science of genetics, and the (older) social programme of eugenics has been extensively examined (Kevles, 1985; Roll-Hansen, 2010). The late 19th-century anxieties over the challenges to the social order, political upheavals, the falling birth-rate in educated and wealthy classes, the perceived decline in the biological 'fitness' of young generations, all supported interest in the biological basis of these changes, and genetics provided a scientific method and language to study the problem (Bland and Hall, 2010). Both geneticists and eugenicists subscribed to the idea of stable heredity; many geneticists agreed with eugenic social goals; eugenicists by and large copied the genetic methodology. They collected human pedigrees and mapped loosely defined traits such as 'alcoholism' or 'insanity' onto human genealogy charts similarly to the geneticists' mapping of the fruit fly eye colour or plant height (Bland and Hall, 2010).

But observations collected on humans did not always lend themselves easily to the geneticists' methods. Most traits that were distributed according to Mendelian ratios – albinism, polydactyly, haemophilia – were comparatively rare and so, while often clinically severe, not significant at the population level. Yet those recurring traits that appeared frequently and were of high social concern were hard to fit into the neat Mendelian categories. Geneticists and other biological and medical scientists were increasingly critical of the 'reckless statements' of eugenicists (Roll-Hansen, 2010, p 85). Instead, they supported medical research that would look beyond pedigrees to understand the reasons for recurrence of mental disorders in families.

A new language to describe these recurring yet 'non-genetic' phenomena was needed. Geneticists' criticisms of eugenics did not mean that eugenics was no longer popular. Even left-wing scientists still subscribed to it, though they argued that eugenic methods can only be applied in a socially and economically equal society. In an equal society, they suggested, differences caused by socioeconomic inequality would disappear; and then we could claim that the remaining pathologies are truly heritable (Kevles, 1985).

Moving away from pedigrees yet staying with the idea that it is possible to find a scientific solution to the population-level problem of aggregation of people with mental illness, addiction or intellectual disability in certain families, in 1929, the Wood Report on Mental Deficiency claimed that mental defectives and their families were concentrated in the *social problem group*, making up the bottom 10 per cent of the society – 'habitual slum

dwellers', paupers, prostitutes, homeless, unemployed (Welshman, 1999, p 459; Welshman, 2013, p 68). The Eugenics Society tried to capitalize on this concept and entice the interest of the broader public; intellectuals across the political spectrum were attracted to this idea, including Richard Titmuss as well as Julian Huxley, British geneticist, evolutionary scientist and science popularizer known for his left-wing politics. In 1937, Huxley presented the Eugenics Society film *From Generation to Generation*, which advocated eugenics as a social science that could solve the social problem group (Bland and Hall, 2010, p 219; Weindling, 2012). Yet the research commissioned to find the evidence, and hence strengthen the argument for the use of eugenic policies on this group, failed to support these claims. The economic crisis, the Second World War, the emerging consensus on the future welfare state, all contributed towards both weakening of the interest in this concept and the support for eugenics overall (Welshman, 1999).

In the course of the Second World War the notion of the *social problem group* was, importantly, replaced by the notion of *problem families*. The former concept was a sociological, collective term created out of population studies. It implied a solution at population level: through the access to birth control, sterilization (voluntary but within a society alert to and compliant with eugenic goals), segregation and immigration restriction (Bland and Hall, 2010, p 219). The latter, by contrast, was created by social workers in Pacifist Service Units (PSUs), whose pacifism was expressed in explicit commitment to 'relief and other social work … for the benefit of the community at large' (Starkey, 2000, p 8). And while the PSU cared for people affected by the bombing of the British towns and mass evacuation of children, from the start they had (implicit) ambition to continue their work after the war is over. Their work was institutionally supported by the development of new publicly funded welfare services and underpinned by an increasing concern over the welfare of the child.

This shift from *social problem group* to *problem families*, however, did not mean that the concerns over the hereditary, 'fixed' basis for the recurrence of undesirable traits and behaviours disappeared. Eugenically inspired explanations persisted decades after the war; the Eugenics Society formed its Problem Families Committee in 1947 (Welshman, 1999). Problem families were understood as those who, for various reasons, required additional help from social services. But, once the post-war welfare state provided a safety net against the worst poverty, and to some extent remedied some of the factors arguably causing 'problems' in *problem families*, the arguments for their 'innate unfitness' ostensibly gained strength. Indeed, the discourse of *problem families* reached its peak as eugenics as an idea and the field weakened; however, from the late 1950s onwards the looseness of the concept, lacking evidence, unexamined biological assumptions and implied class connotations, all led the growing field of social work to abandon it.

Intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and the generations of trauma, c. 1950s to 1990s

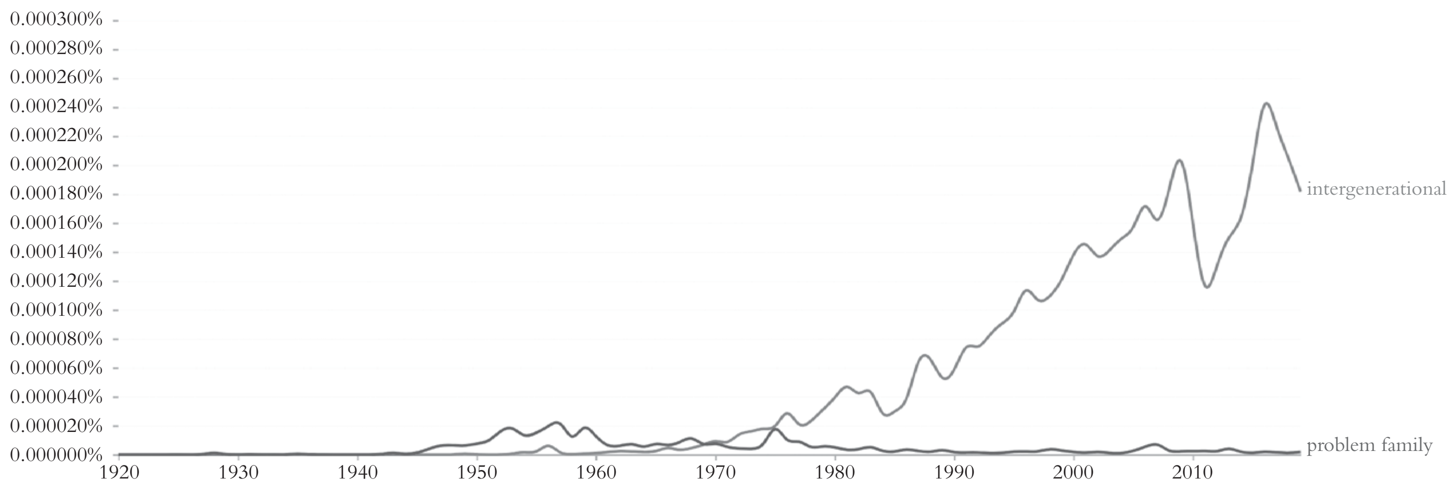
The notion of *intergenerational cycles* (of poverty, deprivation, violence, addiction) emerged in literature – especially in social work, social psychology and education – just as the notion of *problem families* began to fade. In the US medical database PubMed the earliest articles with the adjective 'intergenerational' in the title date from 1954 (Kantner and Kiser, 1954). This finding corresponds with the frequency of both terms in the British English corpus searched using the Google search engine and presented in Google Ngram Viewer (see Figure 4.1). Figure 4.1 shows how neither the term 'problem family' nor 'intergenerational' was in use before the 1940s; but while 'problem family' reached its peak in the late 1950s and then started to decline, the popularity of 'intergenerational' has been increasing overall, despite peaks and troughs.

There is, undoubtedly, a link between these two terms. They both referred to the repeated occurrence of poor health, low educational attainment, addiction and criminal activity, within families and across generations. Yet where *problem families* pointed directly to the family as the locus and cause of the observed behaviour or phenomenon, the concept of *intergenerational cycles* had a more neutral undertone. It called the attention to the repetition of the observed phenomenon across generations ('cycles') but without a judgement placed on the family – a word replete with emotions. The new concept may have been introduced to distance social work and public health from increasingly unpopular eugenics. But *intergenerational* also contained the term *generation*, which was becoming increasingly popular as an explanatory tool in post-war social science (Brumberg, 2015; Bouk, 2018; this volume). It connected the (newer) understanding of generation as a horizontal grouping (cohort) with the vertical transmission, which in turn incorporated both cultural transmission and a biological link, the older meaning of 'generation', yet without explicit reference to a direct biological connection.

Indeed, this lack of explicit reference to the mechanism of transmission in the early papers was probably intentional. The search for a cause of a material, biological nature – genetic or otherwise – could have been interpreted as a revival of eugenic practices. But also, social workers used this term as a diagnostic category to which they applied social welfare tools. A loose definition and a broad scope of their work allowed them to capture, and act on, a wide variety of behaviours and phenomena – from poverty and parenting to alcoholism and drug addiction (Wolin et al, 1980; Ijzendoorn, 1992; Rodgers, 1995).

A distinct generation that came to occupy a prominent place in the changing understanding intergenerational transmission of trauma and, hence, in the conceptualization of 'generations' in medicine and related fields, were

Figure 4.1: The frequency of the term 'intergenerational' compared to the term 'problem family' in Google's text corpora in British English, dated between 1920 and 2019



Source: Google Ngram Viewer

the children of the Holocaust survivors. Post-1945, hundreds of thousands of people emerged out of the concentration camps and ghettos into the world they no longer recognized (Cohen, 2006; Zahra 2011a; Zahra 2011b, pp 3–6; Cohen, 2006). Rebuilding lives back at home was the obvious route to health and normality for all victims of the war, but most Holocaust survivors had no family and no home to return to, through destruction, political change or the hostility of the remaining population in their home countries who might have profited from their disappearance.

Many emigrated to the newly founded state of Israel, to North America or even Australia and Latin America, where they encountered psychoanalytically trained social workers and psychiatrists, many Central European Jewish émigrés themselves (Quen and Carlson, 1978; Cohen, 2006, p 135). These experts interpreted the survivors' trauma using the existing psychodynamic, primarily psychoanalytical, frameworks, in which early childhood experiences and especially family relationships are the key forces shaping personality including their response to trauma (Cohen, 2006, pp 135–6; Zahra, 2011a). The earliest publications that explained the human response to trauma using the psychodynamic framework came out even before the end of the war though these studies were not on Holocaust survivors. A study of the response of London's children to evacuation at the time of Blitz by Freud's own daughter, Anna, and Dorothy Burlingham, argued that the separation from families was a greater source of trauma than the German bombing campaign itself (Freud and Burlingham, 1943; Zahra 2011b, p 89).

But following a period of intense concern with the survivors' trauma immediately after the war, the public interest in the survivors' suffering and help offered subsided (Friedman, 1949; Cohen, 2006, pp 141–2). Historians offer two explanations for this shift. First, psychological help was not part of the help package either in displaced person camps or in the countries in which the survivors returned or newly settled (Cohen, 2006, pp 137–9). Second, in the Freudian psychoanalytic framework the core trauma was caused in the childhood; the concentration camp could only aggravate a trauma that had already existed. Rather than seeing the Holocaust as an exceptional event that fell well beyond the normal human range of experience and response, the unimaginable crime was shorn of its political, ethnic, collective context and 'universalized', by forcing it into existing psychoanalytic categories (Cohen, 2006, pp 139–40). Several decades later, psychiatrists suggested that universalization belied something deeper, the inability of psychiatrists themselves to confront the enormity of the Holocaust (Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982, pp 3–7).

Yet just as the initial interest began to fade, around 1950, a formal structure to support the new and sustained wave of the Holocaust research began to develop. The German Federal Indemnification Law (*Bundesentschädigungsgesetz*, BEG), encompassing three separate laws adopted

in 1952, 1953 and 1956, was introduced to recompense the victims (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2011). Medical and psychiatric assessment was required to establish a link between the abuse sustained during the war and physical and medical disabilities suffered at present (Bergmann and Jucovy 1982, pp 7–8). Many pressed claims and underwent required psychiatric examination (Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982, pp 62–79). Clinical data began to accumulate at the same time as the memoirs and research of psychiatrists-survivors of the Holocaust were published (for example, Viktor Frankl (1959) and Bruno Bettelheim (1943)). From the initial universalist position the pendulum swung towards particularism that recognized the unique trauma that was the Holocaust. At the same time, the idea of the Holocaust as the source of Jewish identity developed partly through conscious efforts by Jewish leaders and through media, for example, through the televised trial of the 'Final Solution' architect Adolf Eichmann or through documentaries and films (Grimwood, 2007, p 40).

Initially the medical attention focused on the survivors themselves rather than their families. Right after the Allied victory, Jewish children represented one of the smallest ethnic groups among the displaced people of Europe, largely because Nazis and their collaborators murdered those too young to work (Zahra, 2011b, p 96). But as early as 1946, that changed dramatically: the birth rate among Jewish survivors was exceptionally high, even in the context of the fertility increase across the Western world, which would become known as the 'baby boom' (Grossman, 2007, pp 184–236). For many, having children was a way not only to restore their family trees reduced to stumps by the war and genocide, their own lives and hopes for future, a life-affirming act amidst chaos and pain, but also to show themselves and the world that the physical and psychological trauma did not render them incapable of childbearing (Grossman, 2007, p 187).

By the 1960s and 1970s an entire new generation born in the late 1940s and early 1950s, whose parents had survived the Holocaust, was coming of age. Though some received psychiatric help throughout their childhoods, it was only in the late 1960s that psychiatrists began to connect their mental health symptoms with the parental Holocaust experiences (Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982, pp 33–8). Study groups of psychoanalytic psychiatrists working in places such as New York and Tel Aviv created frameworks for the diagnosis, specifying who counts as the 'Holocaust survivor', and developed treatments. Through their work, the *second generation* trauma became a recognized clinical phenomenon (Kestenberg, 1972; Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982; Solkoff, 1992). Psychiatrists and their patients wrestled with the difficult question: if the family was the solution to the trauma of the war, what to do when family itself becomes the source of trauma?

From clinical medical journals and books, the *second-generation* voices came into the public realm. Perhaps the best-known writer was Helen Epstein,

born in 1947 in Prague to the newly forged family of two Holocaust survivors who then moved to New York. Her childhood took place in the shadow of the enormous loss that her parents had to live through as they built a new life in an environment so unlike the Central Europe of their youth. Her *Children of Holocaust* interwove a personal memoir, interviews with other second-generation children with a history of post-war reckoning with the trauma of the Holocaust in politics and in medicine. The book was hugely successful, but perhaps more importantly it became a model for the *second generation* writing (Epstein, 1979). This new *second generation* genre combined creative components – memoirs, biographies, novels, even visual arts, such as Art Spiegelman's famous graphic novel *Maus* – with an abundant use of psychoanalytic concepts to explain and situate personal emotions and experiences into longer family histories, sometimes even including essays by psychiatrists alongside creative writings (Steinitz and Szonyi, 1976; Berger, 1997; Sicher, 1997; Berger and Berger, 2001; Spiegelman, 2003 [1986–1991]).

These books presented a more intimate, individualized way of centring the Holocaust alongside public and mass manifestations of cultural memory. They provided a way for this distinct group within the *baby boom* generation to formulate its unique identity. The *second generation* had many shared characteristics with their larger *baby boom* peer group but also its exceptional features: extraordinary parental experiences, separated or destroyed families, and connections to places that no longer existed or could not be visited any more, in the divided post-war Europe.

It is through this lens of belonging to the larger *baby boom* generation, while also being uniquely and profoundly marked by the Second World War, that we can understand how the offspring of the other side – 'Nazi children' as the authors of *Generations of the Holocaust* would put it – came to be studied alongside the survivors' children almost as soon as the concept of the *second generation* was created (Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982, pp 161–227). A specific element in the development of their trauma, it was argued, was the silence that descended upon their early years after the end of the war (Bar-On, 1989). Originally focused on the perpetrators' children only, by the late 1980s German psychiatrists and writers proposed a much broader notion of *Kriegskinder* ('children of the war'). This concept was created to encompass a broader category of (non-Jewish) children born between 1930, or sometimes 1939, and 1945, in Germany, and who were too young to serve in the military yet old enough to remember hunger, destruction and violence (Bode, 2004; Lohre, 2016). Not only were all of them profoundly marked by this trauma, but moreover, it was argued, they transmitted it to the next generation, to the 'grandchildren' (*Kriegsenkel*) born decades after the war.

This literature then helped communicate the idea of the *second generation* to other groups whose parents or ancestors had suffered from mass violence.

A 1998 volume on transgenerational trauma included chapters on the multigenerational impact of the Turkish genocide of the Armenians, Japanese Second World War occupation of Indonesia upon the Dutch settlers; Stalin's persecutions in Russia; ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, to name just some of them (Danieli, 1998). The concept was embraced perhaps the most wholeheartedly by Indigenous activists and scholars in the former settler colonies of the British Empire: Canada, United States, New Zealand and Australia. In these countries where many Holocaust survivors and their families settled after the Second World War, public commemorations of the Holocaust and writings of the *second generation* made its memory a paradigm for a mass trauma. In the United States an entire new generation affected by the war, the young men returning from the Vietnam war – whose mental health and self-destructive behaviours spurred the new diagnostic category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – helped the institutional medical recognition of collective trauma that extended well beyond the US borders (Young, 1995, p 108).

The medical recognition ensured the communication of knowledge of collective trauma through education and professional training. Indigenous people trained as social workers and clinical psychologists became acquainted with the concept of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma through their education. Perhaps the most influential were the social worker Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart; Eduardo Duran, psychologist and Vietnam war veteran, and, public health researcher Bonnie Duran, working with the First Nations of the Pacific West Coast (Duran, 1995; Brave Heart, 1998). These scholars generalized the 'children of the Holocaust' or *second generation* notion into a concept of broader geographical, temporal and clinical scope (Mohatt et al, 2014).

Researchers and activists worldwide embraced this expanded concept, under the names *intergenerational*, *transgenerational*, *multigenerational* or *cross-generational trauma*. It was capacious enough to include experiences of torture, internment, colonization, slavery, political persecution, war, genocide, colonization, land dispossession, loss of language and culture. The reference to multi- or transgenerational transmission allowed for the inclusion of trauma experienced by ancestors many generations earlier. Some argued that while *intergenerational trauma* should be reserved for the inheritance of trauma within families, we should also recognize a related yet distinct type of shared and heritable group experience, termed *historical trauma*. For the latter the link with parental or grandparental suffering was presumed rather than diagnostically established (Mohatt et al, 2014, p 2).

The concept of *transgenerational trauma* had many uses, especially as the vertical generational link was loosened, allowing 'generations' in medicine too to stand for groups with shared cultural and political experiences rather than successive lines of descent. It could explain the persistence of poor health

outcomes – high levels of addiction, mental health disorders, chronic illness and short life expectancy – among the Indigenous people around the world (Brave Heart, 1998; Brave Heart, 1999; Mohatt, 2014). But perhaps more importantly also worked well with the Indigenous relational worldview, now experiencing a cultural revival.

The case of the New Zealand Māori provides an illustration of the ways in which the 'Western' concept of historical trauma was connected to an Indigenous worldview. A key concept in the Māori worldview is *whakapapa*, which can be understood as a genealogy, or a framework, that links animate and inanimate, maps the terrestrial and spiritual relationships, forms the basis of spiritual relationships: between humans and the landscape, flora and fauna of their place of origin and extends into the past but also into the future (Roberts, 2013). Humans whakapapa not only to their human ancestors but also to rivers and mountains: in modern Aotearoa New Zealand this system of knowledge provided the legal basis for granting the status of personhood to a river and to a (former) national park (Geddis and Ruru, 2019). Within whakapapa, where land is not only ancestral but ancestor itself, the trauma of land dispossession is akin to the bodily injury or death of human ancestors. So, while the concept of historical trauma was first adapted by the North American First Nations scholars, and brought to Aotearoa New Zealand through networks of Indigenous knowledge-sharing in the early twenty-first century, we can understand why it was immediately accepted as a way of explaining the long and complex impact of the multi-layered trauma of colonization (Walters et al, 2011; Pihama et al, 2014).

But this expansion, indeed explosion, of the concept initially created to explain the transgenerational impact of the Holocaust trauma also received criticisms. Some argued that the social, political, psychological context of the Holocaust was different from post-colonial Indigenous suffering in important ways (Kirmayer et al, 2014). The persistence of poor health and social outcomes among the Indigenous peoples in former settler colonies, they argued, is better explained as a result of ongoing structural violence, than a past trauma. Others worried that the high popularity of *intergenerational trauma* as an explanatory tool presents a 'global shift in the moral economy by which victimhood status, acquired through individual experiences of physical and especially sexual abuse, has come to wield greater currency than collective struggles against colonialism' (Maxwell, 2014).

A question that began to crop up more regularly from the 1990s onwards, across all the literature on the intergenerational and multigenerational transmission – of historical trauma but also the intergenerational cycles of addiction – was its biological causation and mechanism of the transmission. These questions in the previous decades were either avoided, for fear of sounding eugenicist, or explained using the conceptual framework and

language of psychodynamic (including psychoanalytic) psychiatry. The next section interrogates how and why the framework of *generations* and *intergenerational inheritance* remained strong in spite of these challenges.

Looking for causes of intergenerational trauma, c. 1990s to the present

The 1996 paper 'Breaking intergenerational cycles: Theoretical tools for social workers' by a collaborative pair, a social work academic and professional social worker, provides an insight into how social workers, who had been operating with the concept of *intergenerational cycles* for decades, attempted to take stock of their work so far (McMillen and Rideout, 1996). 'Patterns of intergenerational dysfunction often dominate our clients' genograms and social histories,' wrote the authors. 'Social workers are often asked to intervene in these families in an effort to stop the cycle. When the problems repeat themselves in subsequent generations despite our interventions, social critics cite our work as exemplars of failed social programs' (McMillen and Rideout 1996, pp 378–79). Experiences of adverse events appeared to increase the risk of recurrence in the next generation; yet 'most abused children do not abuse their children'. Furthermore, the persistence of the problem may or may not be type specific: some alcoholic parents raised alcoholic children yet others, in what they called 'cross-typal transmission', had non-alcoholic children who suffered from other problems. Finally, intergenerational theories were, ostensibly, descriptive rather than analytical: they said little about the substrate and the mechanism of the recurrent phenomena ('what is transmitted and how').

Figure 4.2 summarizes the key theories of intergenerational transmission discussed in social work literature in the late 20th century, including ideas about the substrate and mode of transmission and possible intervention targets. As the post-war welfare state gave way to a neoliberal, market-based solutions to social and health problems, social services found themselves in danger of cuts. The new economic philosophy required specific targets for intervention grounded in cost-benefit analysis: which interventions provide the highest return; how to achieve the best health outcome for the lowest expenditure. The review argued that while none of the fields and theories that contributed to the intergenerational theory had provided a satisfactory explanation of either the mechanisms of transmission or of the ways to stop these intergenerational cycles of deprivation and trauma, the answer did not lie in abandoning the concept altogether. Rather, the way forward lay in the integration of different theoretical perspectives, which would then in turn open up new intervention methodologies and new conceptualizations of the transmission pathways.

One of the key elements in this integrated theory of intergenerational cycles was the role of genetics and heredity. 'Slowly, scientists are discovering

Figure 4.2: Theories of intergenerational transmission in social work literature

Theory	What is transmitted	How it is transmitted	Intervention targets
Genetics	Not yet determined	Heredity – specific mechanisms to be determined	Coping strategies for dealing with inherited predispositions
Social learning theory	Learned behavior	Observational learning, reinforcement	Dose of exposure; reinforcers of prolem behavior; function and forethought
Bowen's family theory	Symbiotic parent-child relationships; inability to cope rationally and objectively	Parent-child relationships. triangle relationships, mate selection	Coping strategies; individuation; parent-child interaction
Attachment theory	Internal working models of self and others; patterns of relating	Parental interactions guided by views of self and others	Views of self and others; patterns of relating views of adverse experiences
Self psychology	Unmet needs for admiration, calmness and twinship	Unmet needs create parents who use children to meet their own needs, creating more unmet needs in the offspring	Parental and child needs for affirmation and merging with calmness of idealized others
Rutter's model of risk and protection	Because the model was built deductively, it is not clear what is transmitted. May include poor views of self, decreased opportunities	Unclear, but one potential mechanism is negative events that predispose to other negative events	Dose of exposure, negative chain reactions; self-esteem and self-efficacy increased support; opportunities

Source: Redrawn from J.C. McMillen and G.B. Rideout (1996) 'Breaking intergenerational cycles: Theoretical tools for social workers', *Social Service Review*, 70(3), 378–99, p 393 (Appendix A), courtesy of the University of Chicago Press.

genetic markers for behaviors once thought to be socially determined' (McMillen and Rideout, 1996, p 380) Decades after social workers had excluded genes from their considerations of the causes of *problem families*, biological heredity was making a comeback. This 'return of the gene' can be explained by the growing influence of the science of genetics, which reached its pinnacle in the 1990s, the decade of high financial and emotional investment in the Human Genome Project (Kevles and Hood, 1992). Yet, while the primacy of the gene was unchallenged, the science of heredity was nevertheless changing. Where once research into environmental influences upon genes was largely sidelined, gene-environment interaction was now a recognized part of orthodox genetics.

Indeed, the new field of epigenetics was beginning to provide some plausible hypotheses – and early evidence – of *how* environmental impact could have a lasting, hereditary impact (Jablonka and Lamb, 1995; Buklijas, 2018). The gene itself remains unchanged, the argument went, but the gene *expression* – meaning, whether the gene was 'switched' on or off – could change (Gluckman et al, 2011a). This change took place through the attachment of a small chemical group to DNA upstream of the gene (promoter region), or through a change in the structure of small proteins in the nucleus (histones); or through some other chemical mechanisms. Importantly, studies on organisms as different as plants, insects and mammals, showed that such environmentally induced modifications could not only last through the lifetime of the examined organism but also be inherited by subsequent generations (Jablonka and Raz, 2009; Heard and Martienssen, 2014).

Epigenetics opened up debates in the science of heredity that had been largely closed for decades, ever since the transcription of DNA had been acknowledged as *the* hereditary mechanism (Jablonka and Lamb, 1995). A major question was how significant – how stable, and how widespread in the living world – epigenetic inheritance truly was (Grossniklauss et al, 2013; Heard and Martienssen, 2014). Were the patterns of gene expression directly copied, akin to the genetic inheritance? Were they simply a result of the simultaneous exposure of the mother, the embryo/fetus she carried in the womb and its own early sex cells – hence, three generations under exposure, all at once? Or, were these patterns re-established in each successive generation, under the influence of the stable, or recurring, environment?

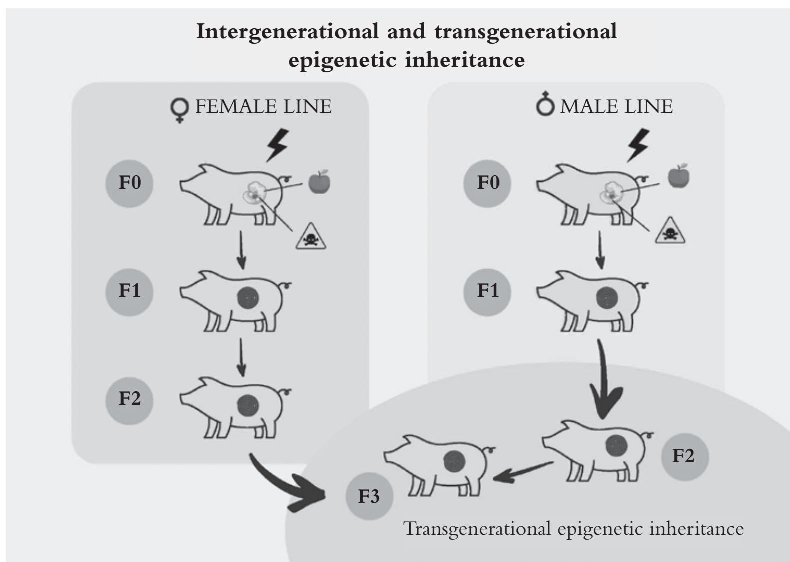
To deal with these complexities, new terminology was introduced. In other disciplines, such as psychology, *intergenerational inheritance* tended to refer to transfers from one generation to the next, and *transgenerational* across multiple generations (see Williams in this volume). Here, *intergenerational inheritance* extends from two to three generations: the parent (F0), the embryo/fetus or the future child (F1), and (if the parent is the mother) the grandchild (F2), as the influence would likely affect the very early predecessors of sperm or

egg cells in the embryo/fetus (Gluckman et al., 2011b). *Transgenerational inheritance* by contrast implies the inheritance independent of the direct exposure, similar to the inheritance of DNA itself (see Figure 4.3). Figure 4.3 illustrates the concept of epigenetic inheritance in mammalian organisms, including humans. F0 stands for the parental generation, F1 for the child, F2 for the grandchild and so on. When a female animal (F0) is exposed to an environmental factor (food, toxin, or a stress-inducing event) during pregnancy, this exposure affects the fetus (F1) too, including its early germ cells. These early germ cells develop into either egg or sperm cell lines, depending on the sex of the fetus, and these sex cells then later give rise to the next generation, F2. If there is evidence for epigenetic inheritance in F1 and F2, but not in F3 (or later generations), this type of inheritance is understood as a result of the direct exposure on the fetal body or early germ cells during the F0 event and it is termed *intergenerational*. However, if there is evidence of epigenetic change in F3 or even further down the line, then this finding is interpreted as a result of copying of epigenetic marks across generations and termed *transgenerational*.

In the male line, the individual (F0) and their early germ cells (F1) are simultaneously exposed; so the finding of epigenetic change in F2 (rather than F3) is considered evidence of *transgenerational* inheritance.

Generations in this context stand for the vertical link, the line of descent: inheritance could happen 'between' generations, with grandparents and parents passing short-lived formation about a presumably transitory – but

Figure 4.3: Intergenerational and transgenerational epigenetic inheritance



significant – change of the environment; or it could be passed on for multiple generations, unchanged, akin to inheriting genetic sequences. Yet, where many scientists understood this vertical link as having an exclusively biological, reproductive nature, others argued for a much more expansive redefinition of heredity across generations. In this view, genes and epigenetic alterations are considered the deepest layers in a rich tapestry that includes behavioural and cultural components (such as learning, family and social traditions) of the familial environments (Jablonka and Lamb, 2005).

Although the science of epigenetic inheritance was – and remains – by no means settled, media became its enthusiastic promoters. Titles such as 'You are what your grandmother ate', 'Grandma's experiences leave mark on your genes' and 'Pregnant 9/11 survivors transmitted trauma to their children,' spread across the pages of widely read newspapers and news outlets such as *The Guardian* or BBC (Richardson et al, 2014). Social scientists criticized these reports, arguing that they oversimplified and exaggerated the findings and, by doing so, reinforced the traditional responsibility of the mother for the child (Richardson, 2021). The new element was that this responsibility now started not only well before the birth – indeed, before the pregnancy – but it also extended well beyond the child's lifetime, onto future generations (Meloni and Pentecost, 2020).

But the genealogical way of thinking struck a chord with many different audiences. Perhaps the most striking example of how the communication of the new science of heredity was linked with the familiar – and familial – narratives of the generational histories was the 2005 documentary *The Ghost in Our Genes*. This film was part of the longstanding BBC Horizon TV series that had been launched in 1964 with the intention 'to present science as essential part of our twentieth century culture'. In this film several of the most prominent scientists in the field of epigenetics (for example, Marcus Pembrey, Wolf Reik, Jonathan Seckl) discussed some of the best-known studies of the transgenerational impact of environmental changes (BBC, 2005). Most of them were studied by epidemiologists and clinicians long before any epigenetic molecular techniques were available, combining medical data – general and specific mortality, infant weight, disease frequency – with historical records such as the size of the harvest or food prices. Epigenetics was now supposed to provide a mechanistic explanation of relationships between these seemingly disparate variables.

Perhaps the most famous of all was the Dutch Winter Famine study. Launched immediately after the end of the Second World War, it examined the human reproductive impact of the intense but time-limited restriction in food supply, during the German blockade of Western Holland from September 1944 to May 1945 (Smith, 1947). Thanks to the meticulous records of the women's food rations, infant birthweight, rates of stillbirth, record of infant malformations and other health data, this so-called 'natural

experiment' became the start of a multigenerational study that tracked not only the long-term impact of starvation at different trimesters of pregnancy upon the child as it grew, developed and then aged but also on the second, and then third generation. While initially this study was conducted using clinical and epidemiological methodologies – recording the health data, fertility and intelligence test results of the offspring, to name just some variables – by the early 2000s the study team began to apply epigenetic methods. The famine that these children experienced while still in the womb, the argument went, left a signature in the form of an epigenetic mark, still visible some 60 years later (Heijmans et al, 2008).

The popular fascination with the scientists' effort to illuminate our past and bring us closer to the future generations was, of course, not new. Much of the cultural 'mystique' that has surrounded the DNA and the gene has been about the promise of explaining who we are and where we came from (Nelkin and Lindee, 1995). The distinction of epigenetic studies was in that they went beyond the crude outlines of reproductive histories, recorded in genetic pedigrees, and migrations, which constrained or enlarged genetic diversity. Building on the longstanding historical epidemiological research, these studies made a (biological) sense of the rich stories of people's lives, especially their suffering: of wars, violence, bad crop years, poverty and famines.

The narrative structure and the visuals of the film *The Ghost in Our Genes* both reflect and reinforce this message. The film opened with the narrator's statement that: 'We are on the brink of uncovering a hidden world. The world that connects past and future generations in ways we never imagined possible.' This opening was followed by the statements by scientists: '[It] makes me feel closer to my children. What I experience, in terms of environment, will have some type of a legacy in my children, and my grandchildren,' said the Cambridge epigeneticist Wolf Reik. The message was further emphasized by the imagery, showing modern-day families (including the families of scientists) interspersed with the sepia photographs of the ancestors: as orderly aligned family portraits, or as 'ghosts' of difficult historical times: wars, prisons and barren fields.

Perhaps the best example of how the new science of epigenetics provided not so much new evidence, but new and more authoritative, molecular language of *intergenerational inheritance* including intergenerational trauma, is the history of disciplinary transformations of the studies of the *second generation* of the Holocaust. By the 1980s psychodynamic studies of the offspring of Holocaust survivors were increasingly criticized, by opponents who sought a better understanding of the wide range of symptoms that the *second generation* exhibited. These critical voices were part and parcel of the broader shift in psychiatry, in the US but also internationally, away from psychoanalysis and psychodynamic approaches and towards a 'biological' approach that more

closely aligned with the rest of medicine: using randomized clinical studies with control groups, biostatistics and clinical psychology (psychometrics) (Shorter, 1997). The aim of this turn was to locate the causes and mechanisms of mental illness in biological processes of the brain, in order then to develop treatment that can be delivered more easily – and much more cheaply – than psychoanalytic sessions.

The entrance of biological psychiatry was the first step towards the molecularization of intergenerational trauma, and in this transformation an important role was played by researchers who merged their professional background in biological psychiatry with their own *second generation* histories. The best example is that of Rachel Yehuda, born in 1959 in Israel to an observant Jewish family, with a rabbi as her father. She then moved to Cleveland and a neighbourhood populated by the Holocaust survivors (Tippett, 2017). In graduate school, she researched the role of stress hormones, which are produced by adrenal glands, upon the brain development in rat pups: it appeared that pups whose adrenal glands were removed – and hence, did not produce stress hormones at all – had larger brains that those with adrenals intact. Looking for a human project that could use her skills, she took up a clinical research position for the Veterans' Administration, just after the moment when 'post-traumatic' stress disorder was first recognized as a psychiatric diagnosis (Young, 1995). The aim of her research was to explain the finding of low cortisol in Vietnam veterans. This observation confounded the researchers: as a hormone that is released by the adrenal glands in high-stress situations, it was expected that soldiers would have high levels. Unable to explain the clinical finding of low cortisol in combat Vietnam veterans, Yehuda's team decided to test another group that had undergone profound trauma: Holocaust survivors. They too appeared to experience symptoms crucial to the diagnosis of PTSD (dreams/nightmares, flashbacks), and their results confirmed the finding in Vietnam veterans: they had low cortisol too, and this biological indicator was strongly associated with PTSD symptoms (Yehuda et al, 1995).

Through the late 1990s and early 2000s this research project took up the question of the *second generation*. The survivors' offspring, Yehuda and her collaborators found, had the same biological association between low cortisol and PTSD symptoms as their parents (Yehuda et al, 2000). But rather than explaining the recurrence of PTSD symptoms as a result of the disrupted psychological development in the early childhood, as psychodynamic psychiatrists did in the 1970s, with low cortisol a secondary outcome of the mental illness, Yehuda reached for the emerging epigenetic toolbox of explanations (Yehuda and Bierer, 2008). Epigeneticists used animal models and human participants to propose that the levels of stress hormones in pregnant mothers – and, possibly, epigenetic 'stress' markers in fathers – could 'programme' the stress hormone receptors of the offspring. In turn,

these could up- or down-regulate the fetal stress hormone production – and perhaps be transmitted, further down the line and in the form of epigenetic marks, to future generations (Weaver et al, 2004; Yehuda and Bierer, 2008).

Yehuda's own study of epigenetic markers in the offspring of the Holocaust survivors resulted in findings that were conflicting and difficult to interpret (Yehuda et al, 2014). Where only the father was a Holocaust survivor with diagnosed PTSD, the child's epigenetic changes corresponded with those found in the animals with 'uncaring' mothers, understood to have experienced a high-stress, traumatic early childhood: they had low numbers of glucocorticoid ('stress hormone') receptors, which corresponded with the higher levels of stress hormone. Yet where both parents were Holocaust survivors with PTSD, epigenetic changes were in the exactly opposite direction, closer to those found in animals whose mothers were 'caring'. Yehuda attempted to explain her findings by suggesting that the 'overattached' mother somehow overcompensated for the influence of the withdrawn father. But these explanations only confirmed to the critical scientists that the study was rife with methodological problems: small differences in epigenetic markers, which could have arisen randomly; inadequate presentation of raw data in the paper; and, finally, the fact that stress hormone receptors were regulated from multiple points (promotors) and that the study focused on 'one of the weakest' (meaning, those regulatory sequences that had the least impact on the stress hormone production).

Yet at the same time, for those who had come to epigenetics hoping to find a way to capture the elusive effects of family environments, Yehuda's complicated results only confirmed that the finding was always going to be nuanced: epigenetic markings were, after all, fine-tuning of the stress system in response to the close familial environment.

Furthermore, the public interest in this research was huge. 'Epigenetic inheritance' became almost synonymous with intergenerational and also historical and collective trauma (Dubois and Gaspare, 2020). Yet in contrast to the early definitions of epigenetics, where it was imagined as an important, but by no means the dominant, component of inheritance that was passed across generations, it was now presented as equal to genetics. The 'non-biological' transmission modes, namely cultural inheritance and behavioural learning, were again fading into the background.

This popularity of the epigenetic model can be seen as one outcome of the considerable and expanding authority of molecular science. But another important aspect is the growing awareness of, and concern with, the rapidly and radically changing human environments and their impacts on human reproduction (Lappé, Hein and Landecker, 2019; Baedke and Buklijas, 2022). From the rapidly changing diets to new environmental toxins – endocrine disruptors, radiation, air pollution; to social stressors and to the yet to be fully understood exposures created through the climate changes, it is clear

that the environments of our ancestors were different from our own, and that the environments of future generations are difficult to even imagine. Even if it could not provide a way to control and slow down the change, epigenetics at least offered a translation tool, a mode of communication between generations.

Conclusion

The term *generation* is used today usually in the horizontal sense, describing a social cohort, yet in medicine and human biology its older vertical meaning derived from the Latin *generatio* has remained strong. Through the 20th century both *generation* and its derived concepts – the adjectives *intergenerational*, *transgenerational* and *multigenerational* – have been defined in relation, and sometimes in opposition, to the prevalent trends in thinking about heredity. *Intergenerational* came into use in the mid-20th century to capture the recurrence of certain (pathological) phenomena in successive generations. It implied a vertical, procreative link, while staying clear of the suggestion of heredity; a deft move at the time when many scholars and professionals were trying to distance themselves from the increasingly problematic legacy of eugenics.

The notion of the *second generation* – the 'baby boom' children of the Holocaust survivors – combined the suggestion of the procreative link with the increasingly widespread social cohort concept. Through popular culture that made Holocaust the symbol of the human trauma, and thanks to the success of 'generational' thinking, the notion of the *second generation* trauma was adopted by many around the world. They saw themselves as descendants of generation(s) indelibly marked by the profound trauma, of war, famine, political violence or genocide. The capaciousness of the term, where the vertical link meant both a form of biological – but definitely non-genetic – transmission, and a shared cultural experience, combining both meanings of the generation, allowed the idea of second (and then *inter-*, *multi-* and *transgenerational trauma*) to be filled with multiple meanings, leading to new concepts of *historical* and *collective trauma*.

Reconsiderations of the nature of biological inheritance from the 1990s onwards, with the new science of epigenetics 'capturing' the early developmental environment in the form of biochemical marks, could be seen as a boost for the vertical understanding of generation. The terms *intergenerational* and *transgenerational inheritance* were imbued with new, precise meanings: *intergenerational* to stand for a short-term heredity, across no more of three generations, simultaneously exposed to the same environmental factor; *transgenerational* for a long-term, multigenerational impact that cannot be explained by the exposure directly affecting the developing organism. But it could also be understood as the integration of the horizontal

understanding of generations into medical and biological thinking. In the fast-changing world, experiences of past generations still had the power to shape us – even if our culture, our way of life, had so little in common with our ancestors. As the epigeneticist Michael Skinner said in the introduction to the BBC documentary *The Ghost in Our Genes*: 'What this means is, that environmental exposure that your grandmother had, could cause disease in you, even though you'd never been exposed to the toxin. And you will pass it on to your grandkids.'

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5

A Conjunctural Cultural Studies Approach to the Millennial

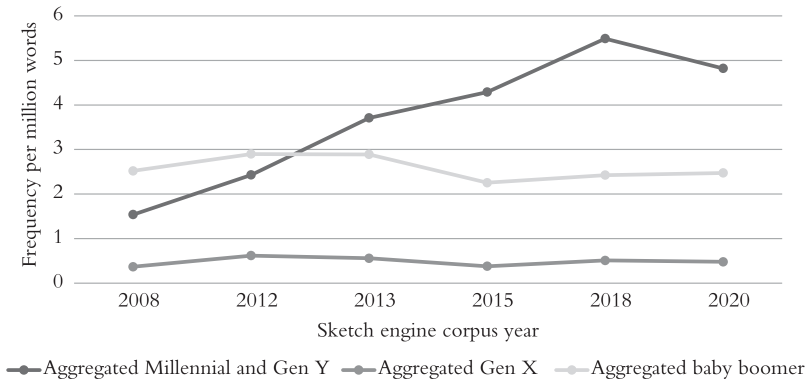
Ben Little and Alison Winch

Around 2013, the term 'Millennial' to describe a new generation became the most widely used generational word on the English-speaking internet. By 2018 it was appearing online more than two and a half times as frequently as 'Baby Boomer'.

By looking at big data corpuses of online language use through the software Sketch Engine (see Figure 5.1), we can see how generational terms enter widespread usage and the rise and fall in their use over time.[1] From 2008 the use of the term 'Gen X' remains steady and 'Baby Boomer' starts to decline after 2013.

In this chapter, we trace some of the different discourses that centre the Millennial. We can understand 'Millennial' as a sociological category – those born after 1979, or from 1982–1996, depending on who you are reading (for example, Howker and Malik, 2010; Little, 2010). But we can also recognize it as a social type with ideological underpinnings. For example, in the UK and US news media Millennials were caricatured as 'snowflakes' who splash out on avocado on toast rather than buying their own homes, as well as being narcissists – remember the 2013 *Time* magazine's cover story about 'The Me Me Me Generation'. However, more recently we see authors, journalists and podcasters identifying with the label of Millennial and harnessing this to political critique. We explore why the Millennial became so visible after 2008 and to what purpose. We also examine how these discourses have changed over time. We discuss these questions further below, using conjunctural analysis from the Cultural Studies tradition.

Figure 5.1: Generational terms on Anglophone Internet, 2008–20



Generation and the 2008 crisis

The 2008 financial crisis produced multiple locations for the identification of generational phenomena. We understand this moment as significant for a number of reasons. It was a time of social trauma but also a moment in history where broad cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 2005), that is the subsection of society taking the leading role in directing wider social orientation, shifted from financial services to digital capitalism. This was no revolution however, instead the crisis forced financial services into retreat and their project of financialization and quantification of all aspects of life was taken up in modified form by the 'New Patriarchs of Silicon Valley' (Little and Winch, 2021; Gilbert and Williams, 2022). Framing our argument through a period crisis is significant because, as Jonathan White, following June Edmunds and Bryan S. Turner (2005) and others, argues, 'Generational consciousness and social trauma have tended to go hand-in-hand' (White, 2013, p 219).

The year 2008 was generational in two ways. The fallout from it meant that young people as a group were more badly affected than older people as a group (Howker and Malik, 2010; Milburn 2019). This doesn't mean that all older people escaped suffering and all younger people had their futures destroyed, rather that there was a strong and widely accepted understanding that people were differentially affected by age, backed largely by empirical data (although this is disputed or nuanced by various scholars and academics (see Roberts, 2015)). For example, generation or age intersects with specific structures of oppression such as class, citizenship and race (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Sobande, 2020). While much early mediated generational discourse bunched all young people under the figure of the white, middle class Millennial who became hypervisible, it is clear that the issues facing this figure or social type had already been part of a long and pervasive history for marginalized groups.

The second way 2008 was generational is that it was self-reflexively experienced as generational by those coming of age at that time (Howker and Malik, 2010; Clay, 2012; Scott, 2018; Petersen, 2022). The 'no more boom and bust' capitalism of the early 2000s was shown to be fallible: the technocratic proclamations of a utopia of endless growth by economists and politicians were revealed as wild optimism in the face of historical precedent. And yet key elements of the system were able to persist (Crouch, 2011). The visibility and inevitability of the climate crisis combined with the crash produced a psychic trauma for a generation. It was evident that the expectations young people might have for how their life would progress, how society would be organized in their lifetimes and so on would have to radically change. This is illustrated in books written by Millennials post-2018 and which we discuss in the final section.

A generation can be said to emerge in a moment of rupture. The work of Karl Mannheim can help us understand this in sociological terms. After 2008 the old socio-economic and political system was delegitimized. The neoliberal managerialism expressed in New Labour's 'Third Way' was replaced by digital capitalism, which did nothing to fix the underlying problems of the crisis. Indeed, key cultural features of neoliberalism were preserved. This is why Helen Anne Petersen states that Millennials recognize themselves to be 'human capital': subjects to be optimized for better performance in the economy (Petersen, 2021, p 47). The political and socio-economic effects of the financial crash and the rise of tech monopolies converged with the emergence of the smart phone as a key personal technology. These combined to produce a 'fresh contact' (Mannheim, 1952, p 293); a generation that came of age around that time or had early adulthood transformed by these developments. This isn't just significant because of the early mediated moral panics around young people's selfies and attendant narcissistic behaviours, but also because the smart phone deepened the datafication of all aspects of everyday life. It is to a deeper discussion of the conjuncture as an analytical approach that we now turn.

Conjunctural analysis

Cultural Studies has its roots in the interdisciplinary academic practices pioneered at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s through 1980s (see, in particular, Littler, 2016). Using this tradition, we look at both the mediatization of 'generation' and its use as an analytic or sociological category. As this book attests, generational theory is available to many different disciplines in different ways. Consequently, the interdisciplinarity of conjunctural Cultural Studies demands that we do not separate discursive locations from lived experience, or separate out the political from the subcultural, the authentically lived from

the mediated. This is why conjunctural analysis is a useful tool for making sense of generation's multiple valences. In particular, it helps to make sense of the lived experience of Millennials as sociological cohorts, as well as the mediated social type circulating through the US and UK media.

The conjuncture is a way of describing the balance of political forces in social, cultural and economic terms and that is often conducted through analysis of power relations in culture. It is a key concern for Cultural Studies in its political-analytic mode, particularly in the work of Stuart Hall. Of particular interest are the moments of movement from one state of affairs to another. Hall famously charted the movement from social democracy to what he termed Thatcherism or authoritarian populism but later became commonly defined as neoliberalism (Hall et al, 1978; Hall, 1979; Hall and Jacques, 1983; Hall et al, 2015). These movements mark a shift in the hegemonic ideology and concurrent common sense (common sense being an important concept in cultural studies to describe the normalization of dominant ideology and the social tensions and contradictions it can produce – see Massey, 2014). Through conjunctural analysis Hall identified early a shift from a consensus perspective, that called for a balance of social interests, to a firm emphasis on the market as the prevailing and valorized technology of governance. A market-orientated hegemony then, relies less on consensus and more upon what Jeremy Gilbert (2015) has called 'disaffected consent'. As we, and others, have argued we are now in a new conjuncture (Gilbert, 2019; Little and Winch, 2021). This new conjuncture is marked by a move from markets as a mechanism of economic governance towards a preference for monopoly and the use of market type mechanisms for governance of the individual. Instead of several companies effectively competing for market share in, say, Internet search or social media, these new economic fields are dominated by a single actor (Moore and Tambini, 2018; Noble, 2018). And while this happens at the corporate level, every element of our existence is quantified, measured and compared, as datafication extends metrics, previously reserved for the competitive performance of companies to assess share prices, to individuals (Zuboff, 2019; Benjamin, 2019; Couldry and Meijias, 2019). Thus while we might recognize the daily accounting of friends on Facebook, followers on Twitter or views on TikTok being part of the mundane experience of smart phone users, we can also see the steady movement to assessment of capabilities to early years education (Jarke and Breiter, 2019). We can see the emergence of data being used in the workplace to assess the relative economic value of staff members – to the degree of measuring keystrokes or footsteps, in some cases even heart rates (Moore and Robinson 2016). Data is used to assess and compare, to assign value, and this marks an intensification of the market-orientated ideologies of neoliberalism, both in the daily lives of individuals as well as in corporations. This conjuncture

is then also defined by the convergence of the neoliberal project with the dataism of Silicon Valley.

These conjunctural shifts are significant when considering the production, mediatization and visibility of the Millennial. A number of actors dominate mainstream public discourse around generation: policy makers and think tanks who generate reports and press releases to be circulated in the public sphere, journalists and politicians, industry spokespeople, and the different arms of promotional media. We suggest that these actors played a significant part in the circulation of generational discourse, especially before 2018. Dataism ushered in an era of intense market shift from competition between brands in the mass media, to narrowband targeting of goods and services to new categories of consumer. For this shift to occur, new ways of making sense of social groups were needed. Consequently, generation became a key layer in the micro-division of consumer subject (Kotliar, 2020). Thus, the Millennial was, significantly, widely talked about as a target demographic (Ferreira, 2020). The traditional ways of targeting demographics through television, magazines, cinema, had become difficult, especially as potential consumers could find ways to avoid being advertised at. How to reach young people was a constant source of conversation in promotional media (and still is – this time in the collective figure of Gen Z (for example, Bloomberg, 2022)). This is compounded by the rise in data-driven advertising and tracking, which meant that online demographics such as 'young people' were intensely surveilled, categorized and analysed. And this aggregated data was used to predict future markets (Zuboff, 2019). In addition, young people were more visible in terms of representations on social media, which itself drove much popular and political media discourse. Young people also became a barometer of how to understand the contemporary moment: for example, in reports such as the 2012 US report commissioned by the Applied Research Center (now called Race Forward) titled *Don't Call Them 'Post-Racial': Millennials' Attitudes on Race, Racism and Key Systems in Our Society*. It is to a more focused examination of the multivarious public voices dominating mainstream media discourse about Millennials that we now turn.

Social contract: UK think tanks

In this section we discuss the Intergenerational Centre (housed in UK think tank the Resolution Foundation) and the UK advocacy organization the Intergenerational Foundation (also registered as a charity). Both organizations have been founded to mobilize policy and public debate including media conversations around questions of generation. We suggest here that such organizations are key distributors of political and media debate on generation. Because of their relationships with journalists and politicians, they are able

to drive public conversations through strategic communications and with the research they commission. What is significant about both organizations is the emphasis on the social contract between generations – this was a discourse that was particularly prominent from 2008 but has waned to make way for Brexit and more recently the Cost of Living Crisis. For example, the 2017 Conservative Party manifesto, led by Theresa May, focused on 'A Restored Contract Between the Generations'. By 2019, the emphasis of then Conservative Party leader Boris Johnson's had shifted to getting 'Brexit Done'.

The Resolution Foundation is an independent think tank with a focus on the living standards of low and middle-income households. Through the establishment of the Intergenerational Commission (2016–18), and subsequently the Intergenerational Centre, it aims to inform and mobilize politicians, policy makers and media discourse to think about households and wealth in terms of generation and generational transmission. Thus, generation is a means 'to track' national socio-economic change through time. The Resolution Foundation employs three communication officers and issues regular press releases, as well as hosting events which are then remediated in various media outlets. David Willetts is president of the Intergenerational Centre and is a former Conservative minister who wrote *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future – And Why They Should Give it Back* (2010; there was a new edition in 2019) which centred the broken contract between generations. Bristow and others have argued that Willetts deploys generational conflict as part of an ideological move that is unnecessarily divisive in a bid to roll back the welfare state (White, 2013; Bristow, 2021).

The Intergenerational Foundation was set up in 2011 'to promote intergenerational fairness and protect the interests of younger and future generations across all areas of policy' (Intergenerational Foundation, 2022). It was set up with help from Ed Howker and Shiv Malik, who co-authored *Jilted Generation: How Britain Bankrupted Its Youth* (2010). Its website is addressed to young people; the homepage reads 'Your Future. Now'. Like The Resolution Foundation it conducts (or pays for) substantial research to influence policy makers, issuing press releases to spark media debate. It also has a social media presence and interactive campaign suggestions, such as a letter template to write to the local MP around the housing crisis for young people.

Both organizations focus on the intergenerational transmission of property, linking it to the social contract between generations. In 2016 the Resolution Foundation set up the 'Intergenerational Commission'. The press release states that the Commission will 'set out changes that will renew the social contract between the generations, ensuring that younger generations benefit from a growing economy in the same way as previous ones have' (Resolution

Foundation, 2016). The Intergenerational Foundation similarly focuses on the social contract and intergenerational fairness. Its homepage states: 'We think it's only fair that younger generations should have the same or a better standard of living as the generations who have gone before. That means creating a new, fairer contract between the generations: one that reduces intergenerational inequality, and provides for tomorrow as well as today' (Intergenerational Foundation, 2022).

By arguing for an intergenerational contract, the organizations deploy a Burkean understanding of generation. The generational thought of Edmund Burke (1729–97) centres the importance of property-based hierarchies and the transfer of wealth across time. He stresses the significance of a social contract between generations in order to maintain what Burke perceives to be natural class hierarchies: 'Society is indeed a contract … it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born' (Burke, 2001, p 261).

It is because of the focus on the social contract that generation was – and to some extent still is – discussed in terms of conflict and betrayal. The multiple books that were published at the same time as *The Pinch* – as well as the promotional apparatus around them – focus on the struggle between generations precisely because the social contract is centred as a key organizing principle of society: rather than, for example, class struggle. This is why, although the Resolution Foundation researches and advocates to some extent for the improvement in the living wages of low- and middle-income households, the main driver is not a critique of capitalist structures but of preserving the social contract across time, which allows for the transmission of property through familial generations. We can see how the discursive formulations of these organizations in relation to the intergenerational social contract, conflict between generations and the amplification of generational identities, are part of a wider public discourse and have been since their inception. Indeed, we can see their purpose as appropriated by and incorporated into a wider strategic push from those in power, to redirect public debate towards the generational contract – including generational conflict – and away from an attack on financial and digital capitalism.

Millennials as social type

The Millennial was a figure of anxiety in relation to the transmission of household wealth as outlined by the UK think tanks above. Focusing on the disparities in wealth between the Millennial and the Baby Boomer, Willetts, for instance, recasts the conjuncture – via the paradigm of the generational contract – in familial terms. His work blames the parents and

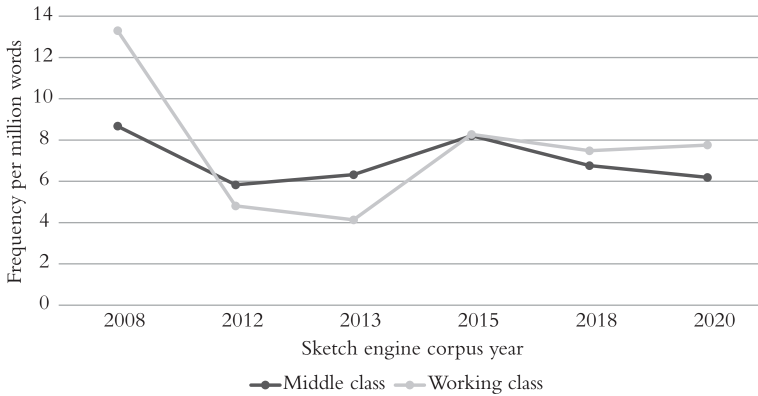
thus obscures how (financial) capitalism has let down young people. What we can see here is how a particular description of a social problem mobilizes different forms of action which then gains recursive legitimation through the establishment of that description as a kind of 'common sense' (Hall and O'Shea, 2014). Social protests that would previously be understood through the language of race or class are replaced by an acceptance of generational social categories – most commonly the Boomer versus the Millennial – that lack the historicism of previous analyses and mobilize solutions in those terms.

The Millennial was also forged through public discourse as a social type. This was particularly the case in the early days of the figure's visibility post-2008, encapsulated in the image of smashed-avocado-eating snowflake. Jo Littler argues that the hippie (Hall, 1969), the chav (Tyler, 2013) and the yummy mummy (Littler, 2013) have been discussed as overdetermined figures 'that gain their force as figures repeated across different media' (Littler, 2013, p 228). These social types 'are usually expressive of an underlying social crisis or anxiety that plays itself out through such excessive and caricatured forms, types that are usually, to some extent, mobilized as figures of fun' (Littler, 2013, p 228). Young people became a vector for both understanding and steering the discursive formations emerging from the crisis. The Millennial as a discursive figure played out anxieties over the recklessness of the banks; caricatured as consuming pricey coffee, rather than investing in the property ladder (a ladder that had become almost impossible to climb). This was combined with the hegemony of dataism: while much early mainstream media attention was focused on the narcissistic Millennial girl taking, editing and sharing endless photos of herself, she was a foil to Silicon Valley's ideology of dataism, which was becoming entrenched as a dominant structuring social force in the post-2008 conjuncture.

It is useful to compare generational terms with the circulation of 'class'. In Figure 5.1 we can see the rise of Millennial from 2008. In Figure 5.2 we can see that from 2008 the term 'working class' plummeted. Both figures were generated the same way using the same billion word plus web scrapes in Sketch Engine.

This is no coincidence. There was an ideological shift to obscure the failings of capitalism and the politicization of young people by erasing the language of class and domesticating it within the terms of the Millennial and the Baby Boomer (Bristow, 2015; Little and Winch 2017). Moreover, the tables indicate in numeric form the increased importance of the generational frame, forged through the paradigm of the generational contract or Millennial as a social type. We suggest that both were appropriated and harnessed in the diluting of class as a mobilizing force to address the unresolved financial crisis of 2008.

Figure 5.2: References to class groups on Anglophone Internet, 2008–20



Millennials as entrepreneurs

We see how this vulgar use of generational figures can be played out in a celebrified appropriation of a generational frame. Millennial discourses are particularly popular in these instances for PR purposes to efface differences and express the concerns and responsibilities of people in specific social locations as representing a universal generation. Again, when thinking conjuncturally about the economic decline following the financial crash and rise of technology companies, this happens most obviously in the generational social types produced in the rhetoric of technology entrepreneurs, the dominant figures within the new hegemonic order.

Here we look at how Mark Zuckerberg frames his 2017 commencement speech at Harvard (among other places) to argue for the entrepreneurial zeal of people born at the same time as him. He argues that Millennials have a shared mission to seek purpose, not just for themselves but for others. The speech effectively equates Zuckerberg's own ideological mission with that of the Millennial: he shapes a narrative where social responsibility falls on the shoulders of a whole generation but with problems that his company or his foundation are directly orientated to solve. Thus, he claims that economic decline and social isolation can be addressed by a social network like Facebook, while his great wealth is focused on tackling specific health issues. And for inequality as inherited by Millennials: they will not only find new solutions, they will think about it differently. As he puts it: 'I want to talk about three ways to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose: by taking on big meaningful projects together, by redefining equality so everyone has the freedom to pursue purpose, and by building community across the world' (Zuckerberg, 2017).

While his core message is progressive, classically social democratic even, the displacement of a language of class with one of generation as the key social agent puts him in line with the think tank literature we looked at earlier:

> Every generation expands its definition of equality. Previous generations fought for the vote and civil rights. They had the New Deal and Great Society. Now it's our time to define a new social contract for our generation.
>
> We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things. We're going to change jobs many times, so we need affordable childcare to get to work and healthcare that aren't tied to one company. We're all going to make mistakes, so we need a society that focuses less on locking us up or stigmatizing us. And as technology keeps changing, we need to focus more on continuous education throughout our lives.
>
> And yes, giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose isn't free. People like me should pay for it. Many of you will do well and you should too. (Zuckerberg, 2017)

Thus Zuckerberg's key mobilizing themes are purpose, charity and community addressed through questions of inequality and social justice. But these are not legitimated through a traditional lens of inequality, instead it is the generational figure of the entrepreneur who will facilitate new responses to these pressing questions.

Note that this social contract isn't an intergenerational Burkean agreement. Rather it is located in the wealth and ideology generated by digital capitalism. Zuckerberg's mobilization of social justice here comes at a moment when he was at least partly considering standing for an elected position or some other sort of public service. He spent part of 2017 on a political-style tour of the US and changed the Certificate of Incorporation for Facebook allowing him to take up government position or office. Thus, this is perhaps not just PR, but political PR. We understand this speech as part of his political campaign tied to his larger celebrification that was forged to legitimate and obscure his immense power (Winch and Little, 2021).

Zuckerberg's public image diminished shortly after this speech as the Cambridge Analytica scandal broke, but the political project expounded by Zuckerberg has been taken up by Andrew Yang, a one-time Democrat politician with a tech background who explicitly promotes values associated with Millennial tech culture. He produced the documentary *Generation*

StartUp (Houser and Wade, 2016) as a key part of the construction of his political celebrity. The documentary charts the experiences of six start-up founders and workers as part of the regeneration of the city of Detroit over two years. Focusing on disparate examples within the city's tech ecosystem, the film's message is that entrepreneurs are heroic, generational figures, delivering on social change by making (mostly) tech-orientated capitalism a vehicle for transformation. While the film presents an ethnically diverse cast of men and women, the paradigmatic example it offers is the white male-run property company operating out of a frat-house style workspace on a technology product. All the other examples are deviations from the central core. And it is this figure of the paradigmatic entrepreneur, for whom Mark Zuckerberg acts as a role model and cultural touchstone, restless and focused on success under difficult self-set challenges, that comes to define the generational figure presented.

Millennial as generation units

We end this chapter by discussing the connections between the Millennial as a discursive formulation (including a social type) and the Millennial as a sociological category. As we argued above, conjunctural analysis allows us to see the Millennial as both. Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos argue for the importance of generation as a discursive formation over and above its traditional location as a sociological category. More than this, they suggest that individuals relate to these discourses 'in order to build self-identification'; and that individuals 'must always position themselves in face of the narratives that have come to be dominant to describe a given generational location' (Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2014, p 165). In contrast, we understand that this theorization of generation as a form of discursive self-understanding *works with* sociological generations as a means of making sense of a change in conjuncture. In other words, using conjunctural analysis and Mannheim's conceptualization of 'generation units' we can understand generational discourse and social groups *as being in dialogue*.

For the protagonists of *Generation Startup* it is figures like Zuckerberg to whom they are positioning in generational terms. Zuckerberg embraces this in his speech: 'Many of our parents had stable jobs throughout their careers. Now we're all entrepreneurial, whether we're starting projects or finding our role. And that's great. Our culture of entrepreneurship is how we create so much progress' (Zuckerberg, 2017).

The generational ideology binding the Millennial to the entrepreneur is operationalized in this discourse, and it is constructed along hegemonic, conjunctural lines, by leading figures within a dominant group who then invite a wider identification with their position: that is, describing, legitimating and mobilizing others by using generation as a means to

ideological ends. This means the process they describe can be wielded for very specific political projects and in ways that speak to a kind of common sense that must then be renegotiated by those engaging with it. The characters in Yang's documentary, then, are part of what Mannheim would call a 'generation unit' (Mannheim, 1952, p 306). In other words, they are using a shared generational experience of a moment of socio-economic transformation, as the raw material of their unity. The people that form this generation unit are bound by the financial crash and rise of dataism, and they reproduce in their life and discourse the rhetoric of figures like Zuckerberg. But, crucially, they also are engaged in various forms of struggle around the meaning of this generational identity.

This sense of struggle was important for Mannheim, to understand how these generation units come together to form a 'generation as actuality' (1952, p 302). Aboim and Vasconcelos's theorization again needs extending and challenging, if we are to make sense of very different sort of texts that discursively rework the Millennial for more progressive politics, like Anne Helen Petersen's *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* (2021), and Shaun Scott's *Millennials and the Moments That Made Us: A Cultural History of the US from 1982–Present* (2018). In these books, the authors explicitly locate themselves as generational figures. They address, challenge, subvert and appropriate the social type of the Millennial but contextualize this figure in a socio-economic terrain as well as in lived experiences through popular culture, autoethnography, and interviews with contemporaries. Petersen's and Scott's books can be understood as articulating discursive formations to contested sociological categories. And both books theorize the Millennial as caught up in the oppressive structures of neoliberal capitalism. For this reason, their work mobilizes the figure of the Millennial partly to make an intervention into the ongoing mainstream representation of the Millennial as white, entitled and disconnected from wider capitalist structures. We can also see them as disengaging generational experience or identity from the kind of ideological work that Zuckerberg or Yang are deploying in their attempt to garner consensus to the structures of digital capitalism. This is where we can see the potential, but also the limits, of the discursive formations that Abiom and Vasconseulos valorize.

For example, Petersen makes strong claims for a universal generational feeling and experience – specifically of exhaustion – in attempt to describe an historical figure and to mobilize a generational intervention. She argues that: 'Millennials became the first generation to fully conceptualize themselves as walking college resumés. With assistance from our parents, society, and educators, we came to understand ourselves, consciously or not, as "human capital": subjects to be optimized for better performance in the economy' (Petersen, 2021, p 47).

Recognizing the Millennial as a product of wider socio-economic shifts in American society, she also casts generation in familial terms, arguing that burnout has been passed from parents to their children as parents became fearful of losing the middle-class status that had been accumulated through the 1960s onwards but which was under attack from financialization and the ensuing crash. More than this, she recognizes the 'entrepreneurial culture' that Zuckerberg celebrates as one that has invited depression and despair as, thanks to financial capitalism, this generation no longer have their parents' 'stable jobs' (see also Ho, 2009).

Shaun Scott, a Black writer, explicitly locates Millennials as 'the most diverse and disprivileged generation ever' (2018). His book traces the lifecycle of the Millennial in tandem with contemporary popular culture, from the childhood of the 1980s where they were marketed to, up until the present where Millennials have made an 'active impact on our surroundings as adults'. Again, this work makes an intervention into mainstream discourse by describing a multicultural and diverse understanding of the Millennial which then transforms its figurative capacity to legitimate and mobilize other forms of action. Indeed, these later appropriations of the Millennial as theorized through the workings of capitalism and cultural change, may be linked to how, as we can see in Figure 5.2, the concept of class was rising again in 2014. It was at this time that a wave of populist politicians of both left and right around the world started to mobilize people on anti-establishment platforms that used class as a key delineating feature to separate their followers from a remote elite.

These positions can be tied to a range of new forms of politics that have had a generational element: from Black Lives Matter and #MeToo to the waves of political populism often mobilized by much older leaders like Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. These social movements brought generational struggles over the cost of higher education, house prices and environmentalism into mainstream politics. Movements tied to Sanders and Corbyn used class as a key delineating feature to separate their followers from a remote elite. These progressive generation units thus indicate the limits too of privileging a discursive understanding of the Millennial as that negotiation over its identity-meaning spills over into highly charged political debates and back again.

Generation as a political movement

That said, the marrying of generational discourses with political and social movements can be highly ambivalent in terms of effectiveness and outcome. While there is an inclusive use of generational discourse to mobilize groups for progressive transformation, this is far less common in popular usage than more conservative discourses. For example there are conservative and

liberal versions of generational-type politics which take into account race and gender but do not consider the ways that gender and race intersect with class or capitalism as part of a structural analysis or 'racial capitalism' (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Generation is more commonly employed as part of a totalizing discourse which asserts its primacy against, or in the face of, other historical forms of oppression such as racism or sexism. Often its use obscures other framings of political inequality (Little, 2014). Generation when used to mobilize people can produce a 'fun house mirror' (Banet Weiser, 2018) of liberation politics. That is, vulgar generational discourses make a claim that a group (Millennials, for instance) is oppressed by either the dominant group (Baby Boomers) or society as whole at a structural level and needs redress in the interests of social justice; alternatively, claims can be made about the virtues of these generations which then valorize and distinguish them from other generations – as we see above with Mark Zuckerberg's appropriation of the Millennial.

These discourses simplify things to a few narrow, sometimes partly empirical, arguments but can erase other forms of oppression. Generational politics focusing on a specific generation does not have a history before the emergence of that generation as a political unit. This is in contrast to Black Liberation movements, for example where generations of activists understand themselves in relation to those who have gone before (for instance, Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights movement (Winch, 2017)). Moreover, when a generation is used as part of, or to supplant, class politics or feminism, it empties out that social movement of its longer history.

Generation mobilized as a movement-for-itself can also lack the complexity of intersectional interaction and struggle which happens within those movements: for example, the ways in which women negotiated their role in the civil rights movement against sexism (Combahee River Collective, 1978), or Black people struggled against racism in class-based movements and feminist movements (James, 1975; Josephs, 1981; Springer, 2002). Generation's power as a mobilizing discourse is that it offers a *tabula rasa* free from those internal struggles; a pure politics unencumbered by movement history. The reason why generational discourses do this so effectively is because they must be constantly renewed. In other words, each 'generation' must have its primary struggle reimagined and rearticulated not just the first time it emerges but also as each subsequent generational cohort emerges behind it.

The movements against racism and sexism have their own temporalities, their own waves or their own internal generations (Shilliam, 2015; Little and Winch, 2017; Sobande, 2020). But the primary forms of action in these cases are against discrimination, oppression or violence based on race or gender. Generation, used sensitively in these spaces can deepen understanding, adding an element of cultural change or humanize a historical context (del

Guadalupe Davidson, 2017; Scott, 2018). However, it is just as likely to be a location for internal conflict within these movements – harnessing differences between second wave and younger feminists as an explanation that is then used to divide and mobilize the two groups against each other (Hemmings, 2011; Winch, Littler and Keller, 2016). Yet, if we return to the conjuncture we can see how the generational relationship to these movements can be rooted in a wider sociological (and political/cultural) moment and are part of necessary political renewal. The effectiveness of the discourses generated by think tanks stems from their ability to describe a sociological reality in new but recognizable terms. This is still ideological labour for a specific purpose, but it is one that contains enough truth for it to be widely adopted.

The relationship between the sociological and the discursive runs deeper through this conjunctural lens. Understanding the subjects of Andrew Yang's documentary as part of a 'generation unit' – a group of people who make social interventions based on an understanding of politics and society that stems from a novel generational experience – is revealing. In their case this is as part of the 'founder culture' (Little and Winch, 2021) that valorizes young 'genius' men with an engineering orientation that became a central locus in the rise of digital capitalism. But there are many other such generation units which emerged from the post-crash shift following 2008. Petersen and Scott in their books are also engaged with, and writing for, generation units contesting the dominant understandings of 'Millennial'. There are others that map, more or less, onto opposition to or alignment with the emergent social order post-2008. We have mentioned ones tied to social movements, but these can also take the form of youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson, 1976): Grime music could be seen as an oppositional generational movement, or the philanthropic movement known as Effective Altruism can be seen as a sub-culture aligning with tech's hegemony, to give two illustrative examples.

It is this complex of generational association and contestation that allows us to perceive an 'actual generation'. Generations are not monolithic groups or distinct discourses or social movements, but they are a set of cultural, social and political responses, which are lived as well as debated. Not everyone of a certain age group will share this experience equally, but it is tied to a specific moment in history, usually one of rapid change. João Pina-Cabral and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos develop the work of Spanish theorist José Ortega y Gasset ([1933–4] 1982) in order to bring together generation and the conjuncture. They show that Ortega y Gasset's use of the crisis in generational formation is, fundamentally, similar to Gramsci and Hall's use of conjunctural shift to indicate a major transformation of social formations (Pina-Cabral and Theodossopoulos, 2022, p 461). They argue that there is a correlation between conjuncture and generation in terms of individual self-perception and a fluctuating collective identity. In other words, the conjunctural shifts that mark our identity can also mark shared,

partial or whole generational identities. Yet it is also in perceiving the way that 'generation units' – for example, the tech founders that Zuckerberg champions alongside #BLM and young socialist followers of Sanders and Corbyn for instance – build into a wider 'actual generation' that we feel we can see the most useful overlap between the conjuncture and generation. And it is this 'actual generation', with its disagreements and contestations tied to shared cultural reference points that shows us the contour of the conjunctural shift that produced it.

In conclusion, then, we should see the Millennial, as both a discursive figure and a site of material political contestation. In its commonly mediated form, it is a caricatured social type. But the 'Millennial' offers both discursive material for self-understanding for a group born at a particular time *and* a location for contestation between distinct sub-groups, all of whom make some claim on a shared generational experience. And it is in the confluence between these things that a new conjuncture, marked by anxiety over climate crisis, a remaking of social purpose after the 2008 crash, as well as the adoption of the technology and ideologies of the smart phone, can be most clearly seen.

Note

[1] The data for all the graphs in this chapter were generated using the concordance function of the SketchEngine.eu software which (among other things) counts the word frequency of a term within a billion word-plus scrape of the English Language internet in that year. The datasets used were: EngTenTen2008, EnTenTen2012, EnTenTen2013, EnTenTen2015, EnTenTen2018 and EnTenTen2020. Search terms aggregate common formulations of a term: 'Baby Boomer' with 'Boomer' and 'Gen X' with 'Generation X'. There are a small number of false positives using this method as Boomer can be used to refer to a sports team and Millennial can be used as part of a non-generational periodization. However, from analysis of use-in-context through the same software, these false positives are very low (under 1 per cent).

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PART II

Studies of the Generations Concept in Contemporary Life

6

Generative Fiction: Structures of Feeling, Place-Making, and Intergenerational Contact in *The Lido*

David Amigoni

In Libby Page's novel *The Lido* (2018), Rosemary Peterson, 86 years of age and a child of the 1930s, befriends Kate Matthews, 26 years of age from Generation Z, in Brixton, South London. Kate is a journalist, working for a local newspaper, so her professional identity as researcher and investigator precedes her developing status as youthful friend to the older Rosemary. Somewhat unconfident, lonely and prone to panic attacks, Kate makes the acquaintance of Rosemary in an attempt to develop a campaign against the threat to close Brockwell Lido. Rosemary lives alone in her marital home, a small flat opposite the lido. A retired librarian – her former place of work now permanently closed by funding cuts – Rosemary is widow of her late husband, George, a fruit and vegetable trader whose archway shop was redeveloped when he went to the grave. As a couple they were dedicated – indeed, passionate, in every sense – swimmers in the lido from childhood, through their courtship (it begins on VE day) and long, devoted marriage. Rosemary continues to swim in the lido, daily: she is Kate's authoritative informant about the lido's significance to Brixton as a community asset or that meaningful combination of spatial, social and subjective coordinates that qualifies it as a 'place'. The contact between Rosemary and Kate offers a blend between intergenerational friendship and a research relationship that structures this feeling of understanding through place. The chapter explores this blended structure in the context of the study of generations through *The Lido*, asking the question: what functions can fiction perform?

The novel also blends fact and fiction, a well-worn but never intellectually exhausted binary. As Page makes clear in her author's note, Brockwell Lido is an actual living facility with which she became familiar during the (recent) time when she lived in Brixton as a student: thus Page is herself close in age to the Generation Z identity that she ascribes to Kate Matthews (Page, 2018, p 373). Page's story of the lido's fate is an echo of the actual moment in the mid-1990s when Brockwell Lido was closed, sponsored, re-leased and re-opened (Cunningham, 2002). Set during our present moment of urban change and upheaval, Page's fiction imagines the impact of the lido's closure on affective community relationships. In telling a campaigning story in this way, Page's novel generates its affect, I argue, through what the sociologist of culture and criticism Raymond Williams conceived as a 'structure of feeling' documenting a distinctive narrative of social, indeed generational experience (Williams, 1963).

Page's narrative about intergenerational friendship is the basis for a successful protest against the conversion of the lido into private apartments. The friendship between Rosemary and Kate is instrumental to preserving the 'perfect blue rectangle' of shimmering, coldly alluring and restorative, yet curiously impersonal, lido waters (Page, 2018, p 7). *The Lido* resists the most extreme neo-liberal form of place redevelopment to defend the structure of feeling embedded in the social networks and bonds of reciprocity. In other words, the 'social capital' which the concept's leading theorist Robert Putnam conceives as 'connections among individuals … social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' that collectively accumulate through and around the lido to make it a valued community asset, a place (Reynolds, 2019, p 115; Putnam, 2000, p 19). The theory of social capital has been subject to critique, of course: 'capital' can appear as an ill-fitting concept for grasping the social dynamics that Putnam and other interpreters of the concept promote (Navarro, 2002). Recognizing the question, this chapter argues that social capital is best grasped as spectrum of imagined associations from intimately known to impersonal connections that cumulatively create an imagined and positioned sense of place. The complex dynamics of social capital can indeed be seen as a fiction, though as an act of positive making, realized through the imagined possibilities borne by a structure of feeling.

By imagining this spectrum of relationships, fiction itself may contribute through another pathway to the workings and understanding of social value and the forms of resistance to which it can give rise. *The Lido* as a novel has itself become something of a valued asset: positively received as a 'feel-good' novel when published in 2018, it became a *Sunday Times* Top Ten Bestseller (Orion Books website [*The Lido*], 2022). A debut-novel phenomenon, it has accumulated extensive and mostly positive notices on the Goodreads site (Goodreads, 2022). Its paratextual apparatus shows how it can be used

for the distinctively contemporary practice of reading group activity, which can itself be seen as a contribution to the accumulation of cultural and social capital: questions are designed to prompt discussion through participatory reading: 'Places change, libraries close, George's shop becomes a trendy bar. Do you think this change is represented as good or bad? Are there places in your community that have changed – for the better or worse?' (Page, 2018, p 393).

The passage to which this guidance is directed is analysed later in the chapter, it is one of Page's crucial scenes. In being a portable material asset, to be mobilized in social life, *The Lido* is a form of social value that structures feeling through imagined representations of social capital; or, friendship and social networks as they cumulatively contribute to place and community. Key context that I mobilize for this discussion is interdisciplinary work on generations, ageing and literature, and their relationship to civic action and policy discourse (Hogan and Bradfield, 2019; Glendenning, 2019).

The Lido is a source of insight into the contemporary study of generations and my chapter explores the wider contemporary significance of Page's novel of feelings and affect based around intergenerational positioning and contact. The ages of Rosemary and Kate, separated by 60 years, are significant as the basis for this chapter's exploration of intergenerational contact, and of *The Lido*'s representation of positioned friendship and civic activism across the generations, the bonds of social capital and the place of both in pursuit of wellbeing as a facet of place-making. In conducting this exploration, the chapter explores the relative attractions of fiction and policy discourse as sources of reading and engagement, given that ageing and intergenerational practice are significant foci of contemporary policy discussion. As Helen Kingstone's chapter shows, disciplinary foci on generations have been both synchronic, as tended to be the case in early sociology, and diachronic, through the historical reading of literature. Consequently, the chapter focuses on a contemporary novel while contrasting it with a text from 30 years earlier: or, more or less, the span of a generation. In this context, I focus briefly and comparatively on Jim Crace's (b. 1946) *Arcadia* (1992) to establish a contrast between its structure of feeling around generational conflict and place regeneration, and the structure of feeling around social capitalism articulated by Page's novel.

My point is that novels are and have always been the products of generational moments, and the 'play' of generational voices that orchestrate the stories are quite different, producing important narrative variations that can be mapped to social and historical contexts. Novels take shape against a background stories about generational identities and feelings, illuminated by data trends analysed in other genres of writing that stimulate thinking about the relationship between generations and policy, including policies on ageing.

It is in this context that the chapter reads *The Lido* in relation to Bobby Duffy's recent book *Generations* (2021). Duffy directs the Policy Institute at King's College, London, and his book is a significant intervention into the data that shapes an understanding of cohort identities. Duffy's book questions the demographic stories that are being told around paradigms of generational conflict and presents the stories that should alternatively be told – which can disrupt expectations about the relationship between cohort identities, life course stages, and pressing social and mental health challenges, such as loneliness and anxiety. Cohort identities will be important to my reading of *The Lido*, the way in which they intersect with stories told in Duffy's *Generations*, and the structure of feeling that is articulated.

Policy discourse is, in one sense, another source of reading and storytelling discourse that invites organized social action. In this context the chapter looks to policy work from ageing studies, exemplified in the New Dynamics of Ageing interdisciplinary research programme (New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) website, 2022). The exemplary document here is *Coming of Age: Ageing is not a policy problem to be solved* (Bazalgette et al, 2011) on the contrasting reading experiences offered by policy discourse and fiction. Crace's novel *Arcadia* (1992) figures as an exemplary novelistic foil in this discussion. Fictional representations can work to challenge and even reverse received stories about ageing, life stages and cohort identities. The chapter will explore how social and critical gerontology offers insights into the way that contemporary fictions imagine different kinds of social relationships, formations of social capital, and the concept of environmental positioning as a facet of both intergenerational contact and place-making.

Place-making is a powerful, wide-ranging, indeed international policy concept in our present lexicon of key words and an important dimension of social policy for reviving so-called 'left-behind' places (Courage et al, 2020). The idea of place has a generational dimension that is rooted in memory and experience, whether that place be in decline or regenerating. If Brixton no longer counts as a 'left-behind' place, some of its population may be. Those who have reached later life can – through deficit thinking allied to actual forms of deprivation, isolation, and exclusion – come to be assigned membership of a 'left-behind' order. Recent work I have undertaken with the organization 'The Age of Creativity' explores the premise that many of the discourses most closely associated with place-making, such as destination (tourist-led) and heritage-centric place management approaches, often do not offer an inclusive language or practice of place-making for older people (Renowden, 2022). Indeed, our work to date begins to indicate that successful place-making opportunities for older people are often vested in projects that revive and sustain community assets that promote sociability, indeed social capital solutions: and that artistic and research-led projects can help in positioning people imaginatively towards these assets, even when they

are not an innate property of individual memory. The chapter proposes that intergenerational opportunities to 'feel' social capital in dynamic relations should be embraced, and that fiction provides a rich vein of opportunity and guidance, especially where it is integrated into a structure of feeling that imagines and explores the (complex) workings of the concept of social capital.

Generations and the theory of culture

Historians and literary scholars are accustomed to thinking about generations and literature historically, as Helen Kingstone's chapter about the Victorian period for this volume illustrates. As Kingstone argues, while an awareness of generations has been available for millennia, the idea of the cohort identity is traceable to the historical and political legacy of the French Revolution, as well as the emergence of certain disciplines of modern social inquiry (such as sociology). This thinking provides an important platform for historicist, period-based literary and cultural history. Historicist critics have focused on the sociological work of Karl Mannheim in conceiving historically the shaping features that produced cohort identities, and the complex interactions between cohorts, milestones in the life course, and chronological age (as well as gender and class) that Kingstone's analysis in this volume exemplifies (Mannheim, 1952). A focus on Raymond Williams's cultural criticism provides another historically specific insight into the forces of modernity that shaped generational thinking. Williams articulated a theory of the generations in the production of culture, which owed much to what he identified as 'structures of feeling'. In his first book, *Culture and Society* (1958), with its paradigm-shifting focus on the post-1750 understanding of culture, Williams recognized the role played by cohort thinking in a complex pattern of documented cultural expression, organized into selective traditions. His interest in generations is manifest in the comparative table projecting the years in which writers, artists and intellectuals featured in the book reached the age of 25 (Williams, 1980, front matter [9]). In *The Long Revolution* (1961) Williams's theory of structures of feeling – distinctive articulations of cultural expression that are important and valued – went hand in hand with a theory of generations, in particular the view that at least three distinct generations are actively producing varied forms of cultural expression at any given historical moment (Williams, 1963, pp 64–5). This underlined a key feature of Williams's distinctive work on culture: he emphasized the importance of the generational shaping of active traditions and constant processes of making and re-making through institutions and social formations: in effect, the taste-shaping evaluations, activities and processes that over time have come to comprise literary criticism. These institutions and formations actively shape forms of social practice, while being selectively represented in a whole variety of written forms, including fiction.

Historicist critics have illuminated and analysed both the critical infrastructure and the representations from the literature of the past. It is important to remember that the institutions and formations of evaluative literary criticism actively (and innovatively) extend into the present period through reading groups and online platforms: especially, for the purposes of this chapter, where the fiction focuses on later life and its interactions. Williams was a powerful and capacious social critic, yet he never explicitly developed a case for the importance of cultural expression in later life to the energies of wider social life and the resources of hope on which these depend. A focus on social capital and place-making in *The Lido* can extend Williams's project, expanding its capacity to explain *The Lido*'s contribution to tracing an emergent structure of feeling around intergenerational relationships based on place positioning, the improvement of mental health and wellbeing, and social capital.

Resisting policy, reading fiction: *Arcadia*

Recognizing and advocating for the positive social energies of older generations is an important feature of contemporary policy discourse. However, it can find itself in a distinctively second-best relation to the pleasures of fiction, limiting its credentials as a source of place-making. For example, in 2012, the UK think tank Demos published a report, *Coming of Age: Ageing is not a policy problem to be solved* (Bazalgette et al, 2011). Funded by the New Dynamics of Ageing research programme and working with a group of literature researchers at Brunel University led by Philip Tew, the title of the report pointed to a scepticism about the government's assumption that policy discourse was the correct pathway for understanding the ageing and intergenerational challenge. Fiction was conceived as a more palatable, stimulating and inclusive pathway. Borrowing from the methods of Mass Observation, Tew's team recruited eight older people's reading groups, comprising 86 participants. The groups read (a minimum) of nine novels about ageing, published between 1944 and the present: a timeframe, incidentally, that reflects more or less the adult life course of the fictional Rosemary in *The Lido*. The subject matter of the selected fiction reflected, through distinctive patterns of cultural expression, the lived social experiences of the participants who were in the age range of 60 to 90 years. A selected novel of more recent publication was Jim Crace's *Arcadia* (1992), a novel about generational conflict, the redevelopment of a place, and the (violent) direct action arising from both. The acts of reading and discussing fiction were conceived as a stimulus to exploring older people's attitudes to older age and the social challenges that they face.

To that end, the researchers set the reading groups particular tasks. One task was to read Crace's *Arcadia* in relation to the Blair government's policy

report, *Building a Society for All Ages* (DWP, 2009). However, one reader cited in *Coming of Age* referred to her eyes 'glazing over' when reading this policy report. This confirmed a pattern among a majority of readers of total avoidance of engagement with the report (Bazalgette et al, 2011, p 67). The research participants thus overlooked Chapter 8 of the UK Government's *Building a Society for All Ages*, entitled 'Building communities for all ages', which focuses on the socially inclusive role of older people in developing place-based resilience through intergenerational practice:

> To build on this we will explore how we can enable retired people and older workers to mix with younger people and learn new skills while passing on their own skills and experience including career advice. This intergenerational activity and sharing of experiences could help develop children's career aspirations. (DWP, 2009, p 49)

Intergenerational contact is here focused narrowly upon employability, skills and work. By contrast, while the *Coming of Age* report presents work as an important source of active ageing among its older research participants, Demos, with Tew's research team, see active ageing as being also crucially supported by access to libraries and community leisure facilities. This broadening of the possibilities of active ageing is important to the context and place-making focus of *The Lido,* to which I shall return in a moment.

Briefly, and in beginning to explore the varied and highly resonant language of fiction, I want to focus on Crace's *Arcadia*. A novel about ageing and place-making, it is presented in Demos's *Coming of Age* as the engagingly rich fictional foil to the poverty of policy discourse. *Arcadia* focuses on the 80-year old Victor who has risen from impoverished beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century to multi-millionaire status through his business acumen and monopoly of the fruit and vegetable 'soap' market of a Midlands city in the 1980s. Victor reaches his milestone eightieth year (he was a child in the first decade of the 20th century). He thus enters what the novel refers to as his 'second childhood': this is manifest in a desire to sweep away the medieval fruit and vegetable market site, and its traders, and to put in its place 'Arcadia', an oligarch's vision of a redeveloped, modernized market place. He is aided – and frustrated – in this enterprise by two middle-aged employees, Rook and Anna, who also become involved romantically:

> No one would think these two – this sparrow-chested greying man, this woman, warm and pouchy as a pastry bun – were husband and wife. Such wooing, binary displays belong to fledgling romances. Maturer ones are most abashed, less startled and enraptured by the luck of love […] here was an out-of-season *grande affaire* between two people almost old enough to be too old, too sleepy, for such public love. (Crace, 2008, loc. 2143)

The narrator goes on to grasp the 'sleepy' maturity of this ageing *grande affaire* between two people 'almost old enough to be too old', through the language of the fruit market. Like fruit, these ageing lovers are 'matured: however, 'though they have their colour and their shape, [they] will soon begin to brown and rot and lose their flavour and their bloom. To taste such fruit is to taste the gamey pungency of middle age' (Crace, 2008, loc. 2143). For Crace, ageing is decline and the generations are at war.

While the research questions and methods underpinning *Coming of Age* aspire to be positive in their understanding of active ageing, Crace's rich and resonant fictional language productively complicates this aspiration. *Arcadia* delivers a more ambivalent, even negative, view of the ageing process. Taking maturing fruit as its metaphorical equivalent, the reader is transported to a fallen world of rotting, pungent corruption: *Arcadia* is characterized by complacent, inward-looking generational worldviews. 'Pungent', dissatisfied middle age can barely satisfy its own longings, but will still lead inevitably to the myopic 'second childhood' of deranged old age, represented by Victor's lavish fantasies of postmodern improvement. The novel's narrative arc is characterized by conflict (ending in pitched violence), indeed violence between the generations, and absence of understanding between the generations. Crace's title may be ironic: there is no making of a good place in which to age in this *Arcadia*. However, as Tew argued in remarks on narrative exchange in his contribution to an essay on arts and ageing, Crace's novel was still democratically generative. Fictional narrative produced complex, varied reader responses to received images of frail and isolated old age, prompting alternative reflections on connectivity, the politics of representation, and opportunities in later life through community assets and social capital. These reactions, documented in the reading diaries, significantly exceeded the pallid policy blueprint of social and intergenerational activity envisaged by *Building a Society for All Ages* (Murray et al, 2014, pp 82–3).

Fruit, fiction, and social capital in *The Lido*: generational/data contexts for reversing narrative expectations

Libby Page's *The Lido* articulates a different structure of feeling around generational dynamics compared to *Arcadia* and weaves together a different set of generational narratives. It also has a very different understanding of the place of fruit in those narrated relations. If we take 2018, the novel's date of publication as the benchmark for measuring character age, Kate Matthew, at 26, would have been born in 1992 and belongs to the Millennial generation – born in the same year as Crace published *Arcadia* (Victor would have been born around 1902). Rosemary, at 86, was born in 1932: this situates her formative childhood experiences during the later 1930s and

the Second World War. Her early adulthood – romance with and marriage to George – unfolds as part of the post-Second World War settlement. Rosemary's life story and her memory tracks in parallel with the maturation and embedding of Brockwell Lido as a community asset. In drawing this historical and experiential story out of *The Lido*, I also draw upon Bobby Duffy's recent book *Generations* (2021). Duffy helps to interrogate the kinds of demographic stories that contemporary media reports are telling around generational cohort identities, data, and policy: and the stories that should, according to Duffy's arguments, alternatively be told. Duffy's book modifies expectations about the relationship between cohort identities, and pressing social and mental health challenges that place-making can aspire to alleviate, such as loneliness and anxiety.

In order to focus on the different resonances of the language of fiction used by Page, and its consequences for the structure of feeling that *The Lido* evokes, I focus on Rosemary's walk in Brixton market with Kate, in the early stages of their acquaintance (Page, 2018, pp 100–2). In what can be read as an intergenerational place-making projection, Rosemary and Kate meet Ellis. Ellis is a fruit and veg market trader in his late forties (hair greying at the temples). He is a friend of George, Rosemary's deceased husband, who worked alongside Ellis's father, Ken, another market trader originally from St Lucia. Rosemary retains great affection for Ellis's family, including his teenage son Jake, who helps his father out on the stall in precisely the way in which Ellis had once helped Ken. The affection between the families is mutual and Ellis consolidates the bond with gifts of fruit and vegetables to Rosemary, his regular customer and friend, and newcomer Kate: cherries for Rosemary (her 'favourites'), tomatoes for Kate. If fruit in *Arcadia* is always already on the verge of ageing into corruption, fruit in *The Lido* is an expression of social capital. From and of the market but a powerful, socially organic supplement to the market's distributive powers, sustaining networks of gifting and reciprocity.

Kate 'blushes fiercely, her arms cradling the bag of tomatoes as though she is holding a baby for the first time and doesn't know quite what to do with it' (*The Lido*, p 102). Rosemary watches Kate's blush and her awkward hands, for it looks to her 'as though [Kate] is not used to handling fresh fruit and vegetables and a wave of worry rocks through her'. Of course, Kate is holding much more than a gifted bag of tomatoes: in the land of simile ('as though'), Kate is symbolically holding a baby and thereby the future: for this is a fiction about generations and their propensity to re-generate through multiple processes of reproduction, including procreation. Even given Page's deliberately plain style, connotative power and pattern-making opportunities are resonantly available for readers to work on. The future of the lido, of the community and its social capital based on networks, reciprocity and gifting, is in the balance. Kate may not be the resilient custodial link to whom the

gift of the future can be entrusted. Indeed, readers, who have witnessed Kate in the grip of a panic attack, know that Kate is emotionally vulnerable. Significantly, and productively, Rosemary's look of 'worry' may be linked to her own memory revealed in the novel's flashbacks: that she herself struggles with acute emotional pain in this area of her life. An otherwise blissfully happy marriage to George is scarred by miscarriages: Rosemary has reached later life childless (and widowed) – though not, it is important to note, lonely. For childlessness can be seen as important to a place-making process of environmental positioning that sits at the heart of a feeling-structuring research relationship, as I shall argue.

Mapping generational trends: measuring loneliness and anxiety as structured feelings

Bobby Duffy's book *Generations* is a data-led attempt to unpick fallacious and reductive thinking about generational trends. Duffy warns about the exaggerated claims of ' "epidemics" of suicide among the young, or loneliness among the old [that] give a greater sense of threat or change than the actual trends warrant' (Duffy, 2021, p 90). Duffy has valuably mapped the major cohorts of the 20th- and 21st centuries in *Generations*, from the pre-Second World War generation, through the Baby Boomers, to Generation X, Millennials and now Generation Z. Duffy thereby provides a map of cohort birth dates that begins in the 1930s and takes us to the decade post-2000. The cohorts successively experience a collective sense of history that fits neatly onto the timeline followed by Page's *The Lido*. Rosemary and Kate as cohort representatives also 'live', come to embody, and even feel the policy questions that Duffy discusses. Duffy's point is to moderate and revise narratives of stark intergenerational variance and conflict (see, for example, Willetts, 2010), and Page seems to share this aim.

Duffy reports the alarming media headline view that Millennials, Kate's generation, have come to be perceived as 'the most mentally ill generation' by being supremely 'anxious and unhappy' (Duffy, 2021, p 98). Duffy at first hesitates at this (its increasingly being applied to Generation Z) by presenting instead a life stage analysis as a stronger constant than cohort variances. His overall argument about happiness is that there is 'not much evidence of big differences between cohorts; instead it's the repeated relative happiness of youth that stands out, regardless of when you are born' (Duffy, 2021, p 98). Duffy contrasts this with the constants of a pressured and unhappy middle age, with rising levels of contentment and happiness as older age is achieved. The latter is especially significant as it questions presumptions about epidemics of old age loneliness: for decades, the stereotype of the lonely older person has dominated policy approaches to loneliness (Victor and Sullivan, 2015, p 252), albeit that it is beginning to change (DCMS,

2022). As Duffy points out, loneliness has not been measured consistently in any country over a long period: where it has been measured there appears to be, in the US, Sweden, Germany and Finland no evidence of increases among cohorts in later life (Duffy, 2021, p 106). At the other end of the age spectrum, Duffy does acknowledge different emergent trends: members of the Generation Z cohort are around twice as likely to say they feel lonely than older age group (Duffy, 2021, pp 106–7). This follows from a developing trend showing a stark increase in girls and young women classed as having severe anxiety or depression, from under 10 per cent in 1993, when Kate is born, beginning to increase in 2000: then expanding to around 15 per cent by 2014, when Kate is a university student (Duffy, 2021, p 100). There is, consequently, congruence between the generational views of the world presented by Duffy and Page: Page narrates something like these cohort and life course experiences in her novel, and she makes them the grounds for intergenerational contact.

Rosemary is presented as alone without being lonely. Rosemary's widowhood and childlessness results in is a complex picture of being on her own in the world. Rather than unremitting loneliness, Page imagines Rosemary in complex networks and sites of belonging that constitute a nuanced representation of the social capital that is serially presented in narrative. The experiences can include known social relationships, as we have seen from the market. However, structured feeling can also be shaped by the impersonal, anonymous nature of public facilities, including the lido, but in this instance captured in a visit to the local cinema. In a crucial scene in the novel (Page, 2018, ch 23), Rosemary is alone in a crowd of cinema-goers. Rosemary seeks conversation; she is 'thankful of something to say' on receiving a bump from a person who fails to register her presence. However, Rosemary is positively and socially part of the structure of feeling generated by the cinema, the embrace of collective affective engagement: 'when she watches the film she is not alone, she is part of something bigger, one nameless face in a large audience of nameless faces' (Page, 2018, p 115).

She continues to experience her aloneness socially, as it were. Leaving the cinema, she chooses not to return to her empty flat, but walks instead to a busy cocktail bar. She places herself in the venue, talks to the crowds of younger people, finds out what they are drinking. She ends up being advised to drink an 'old fashioned', the ironically named revived fashion in cocktails. Rosemary is presented as a lone individual as two couples talk among themselves and turn their backs to her. Yet, the focus is elsewhere: as she looks up into the exterior of the arch under which she sits, she reads a faded green sign: 'Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: George Peterson and Son' (Page, 2018, pp 118–19). The 'son' is of course her deceased George: the son who helped his father in the market but ended the generational line, a consequence of the couple's childlessness, still inscribed in the redeveloped

trading site of the railway arch. In one sense this risks being read as an act of place-making violence that excludes an older generation and their working lives; and there is plenty of evidence of the actual campaigns of protest that were established to resist the changes to Brixton Arches between 2015–18 (Urban, 2016). Yet, that is not how Page presents it. Instead, she presents Rosemary leading acts of what the gerontologist Kate de Medeiros et al (2013) have called environmental positioning: using social capital networks to position others in relation to potentially unhomely spaces through the conviction that they can be endowed with significance and made homely. Here we can link to the lido as remedy for Kate's mental health challenges.

The starting point for the reader's introduction to the character of Kate is a reversal of an expectation around loneliness: readers might expect it to be the widowed, childless 86-year-old who will be engulfed by the epidemic of loneliness. However, loneliness follows social withdrawal, a by-product of Kate's anxiety, which presents in crippling panic attacks, collapsing in streets and shops. The reader discovers this is response to a competitive London working environment in which the expectation to perform the role of a leading 'somebody' produces pressure and an internally driven self-harm.

Through Rosemary, Brockwell Lido becomes crucial to Kate's improving mental health – and her role in the place-making contribution to the community. First, however, this facility has to become a place that 'makes' Kate. Kate's friendship with Rosemary is based on, initially, a professional journalistic need to understand the significance of the at-risk lido to Rosemary and the community. This is reinforced in part by a series of impersonal narrative vignettes; anonymous lido-users include a pregnant woman who is simultaneously amazed and terrified by her pregnancy; a distressed, truanting 14-year-old schoolboy who has just discovered his parents are divorcing. Both find a way of feeling beyond their anxieties through immersion in the lido's embracing, transformative waters (Page, 2018, chs 6, 16). As Kate's friendship with Rosemary develops, Kate also begins to swim daily: at first in a state of anxiety but gradually in an increasing state of calm as the experience of immersive waters and the sky calm the bodily sensations. For Kate, the regular return of creeping panic comes to be recognized and named as a preying entity living in her, goaded into action by, for example, the challenge of public activity, the campaign contesting the council's plans of closure (Page, 2018, p 142). Swimming in the lido keeps the panic at bay, even when that panic flares up because of the exacting demands of public protest and activism. The personal stakes in fighting the campaign to save the lido could hardly be higher, or more needful.

Kate's improving mental health is positively affected by her sympathetic orientation towards Rosemary's stories about her experience of the lido and her romantic and domestic life with George. Photographic memories are integral to that sharing and they play an unconscious role in Kate's developing

personal life. Accustomed to seeing captured photographed happiness in others, images of a happier, relaxed Kate in the lido as she fights for its future are captured by Jay, her press photographer colleague. Jay gradually becomes Kate's romantic partner. The novel ends with Rosemary's death and the commemoration of a life of swimming and bucking orthodoxy: Rosemary has saved the lido, and a nuclear familial (generational, procreative) future is implicitly assured through Kate and Jay. That can only happen through the calming of Kate's mental health. Kate's confession to her sister about the way in which the city has overwhelmed her emphasizes the role of the lido, through her friendship with Rosemary, as a place of restorative home making: 'they sit on the edge of the pool that Kate has come to think of as some sort of home' (Page, 2018, p 222).

Conclusion: magical thinking and its displacements

To approach Kate's story as an intergenerational story of home building through environmental positioning is finally to link the structure of feeling shaped by *The Lido* to critical discourses in environmental gerontology; these may provide older people with a language and practice of place-making. Novels work as valued, open forms of vicarious participatory art because of the way in which they can structure feelings, providing thick descriptions of social networks, relationships, interactions – the imaginative act that gives felt, nuanced structure to the idea of social capital – and memories. Rosemary's childless experience makes her available to Kate for this purpose but also vicariously for the reader. In research on place-making and childless women, the gerontologists Kate de Medeiros, Robert Rubinstein and Patrick Doyle formulated the idea of 'environmental positioning' as a way of assessing the achievement of place-making in situations where children and the conventional coordinates of generational family attachment are a practical absence. Home as metaphor for made and received place associations is not, in these situations, a given through nuclear familial coordinates that practically operate through tacit and shared frames of reference. Instead, De Medeiros argues, it is a process realized through the mutual creation between the person living in the environment and the researcher. Kate of course becomes Rosemary's friend, but she begins (and arguably always functions through her structural narrative position) as a researcher, in her professional role as a journalist, inquirer. The 'research function' is significant for the distinctive workings of *The Lido* as a structure of feeling.

Novels are shaped by social life through their traditions, institutions, and formations, as Raymond Williams spent a lifetime arguing. However, they are mediated and selective versions of social life. *The Lido* feels its way to Brixton as a restored organic community replete in social capital through which its owners can feel belonging, its traditions of market trading and

the development of a night-time economy helping to assure the future of its lido as a community asset. However, it may in this respect be trading in what Williams described as 'magical thinking' in his account of the structure of feeling of novels of the 1840s. In some ways, Libby Page's solution to the future of the lido feels as magical as the 1840s 'unexpected legacy' (in *Jane Eyre*, for instance) felt to Williams (Williams, 1963, pp 82–3). Ahmed, the young lido receptionist (of Gen Z cohort), busy revising for his A level business studies, works with Rosemary's impassioned telling of her life story to convince a corporate investor to make its logo and brand visible from the pool. Corporate investment flows to the lido, but it hardly feels like a sustainable future. In reality, it proved not to be: in fact, in a twist of historical irony, Page here invokes a version of a sponsorship solution that was deployed only to fail when Brockwell Lido was actually closed in the mid-1990s (Cunningham, 2002).

Thus, I conclude this chapter with a reflection on what, perhaps, has been displaced by a persistence with magical thinking, and which is practically happening in redevelopment and place-making projects around the UK. Our 'Age of Creativity' event shared examples of precisely this organized social reality. We shared projects about place-making, through the recovery and re-building of material assets (from church halls to sites on which gasometers had once stood) but which were sites for developing social and cultural capital. Social gathering was supported and developed, often backed by community research (mobilized by memory, photographs and stories). There is ample evidence of artistic making and social enterprise are joining forces to (re) make places such as urban villages and left behind seaside towns. *The Lido* is a story that mobilizes a version of these relationships, along with a story about generational contact that moves in time to some of the data trends that are being analysed in the worlds of policy and data collections. My argument proposes that generations matter in documenting these relationships: in particular, the agency of older people, but the productive channel is often positional and intergenerational. However, it remains a precarious business: and the magic of fiction may help to shore up the continuing recognition and development of complex formations of social capital through imagined structures of feeling.

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7

Intergenerational Engagement and Generational Identity

Ali Somers

In recent years, interest in intergenerational engagement spread around the globe. Bringing young and old together sparked the imagination of teachers, health and social care professionals, architects and city planners, policy makers, and housing providers alike. Articles appeared in many national newspapers describing new intergenerational projects that bring old and young together through meaningful and innovative projects.

While some intergenerational pioneers have been leading programmes in their local areas for decades, others are new to this rapidly expanding field. This chapter describes emerging models of intergenerational practice, exploring how generational identity can be both upheld and contested through intergenerational engagement. Importantly, the question is posed: do we gain a different understanding of generational identity and its functions when we view it through the lens of intergenerational programming?

This chapter will look at three popular models of intergenerational activity in different parts of the world (1) intergenerational learning, (2) intergenerational housing, and (3) intergenerational training and mentoring initiatives. Intergenerational engagement is a concept that rapidly gained ground globally in the last 20 years. From advocacy organizations, through to a growing body of academic scholarship, those working at community level all the way through to policy makers have been ignited with a passion to bring old and young together in new and inspirational ways.

Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together through ongoing, purposeful, and mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between different generations. These interactions and relationships contribute to building stronger and better-connected communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building

on the positive resources that younger and older people have to offer each other and those around them. As defined by US-based Generations United, 'Intergenerational programs are those which increase cooperation, interaction and exchange between people of different generations, allowing them to share their talents and resources, and support each other in ongoing relationships that benefit both the individuals and their community' (Generations United, 2022).

The World Health Organization published a *Global Report on Ageism* in March 2021 (WHO 2021). Within this document ageism is referred to as the *stereotypes* (how we think), *prejudice* (how we feel) and *discrimination* (how we act) directed towards others or oneself on the basis of age. It can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed. Institutional ageism refers to the laws, rules, social norms, policies and practices of institutions that unfairly restrict opportunities and systematically disadvantage individuals because of their age. Institutional ageism has been found to manifest in a wide range of settings including, among others, health and social care, workplace environments, the media, the legal system, and housing. Interpersonal ageism arises in interactions between two or more individuals, while self-directed ageism occurs when ageism is internalized and turned against oneself. Ageism starts in childhood and is reinforced over time.

As detailed in the *Global Report on Ageism*, intergenerational interventions have been identified as an effective means to reduce ageism against older people and as promising for reducing ageism against younger people. The key characteristics of effective intergenerational interventions as identified by the Report (WHO, 2021) are listed below:

1. All aged participants have equal status within the activity.
2. The quality of contact between the aged participants, with balanced amounts of self-disclosure is more important than the frequency of interactions.
3. Activities that increase cooperation through goal sharing and reduce competition between age groups are the most effective, as supported by research utilizing intergroup contact theory.
4. One review identified that the more well-structured and carefully designed interventions were, the more effective they were.
5. Another study pointed to the potential importance of how participants are grouped, whether in pairs or larger groups of mixed ages. The findings support that those activities carried out in child–older adult dyads had a more positive effect on stimulating interaction than activities occurring in larger group settings. This is a well-supported finding as the mechanism of change in intergenerational activities is the relationship-building process. The relationship between two different aged participants is what changes perceptions held about the 'other'.

Table 7.1: Evidence-based outcomes achieved by intergenerational activities

Type of outcome	Subcategory/description	Age groups
Ageism	• Reduction in ageism, including both stereotypes and prejudice	Older and younger participants
Physical health	• Including cognitive (brain) health • Stimulation of memory and mind • Increased walking and engaging in other physical activities	Older participants
Mental health	• Improvements in self-esteem • Reduction in depression and loneliness • Reduced anxiety • Feeling more able to achieve things, more useful	Older and younger participants
Social connections	• Improved communication skills • Feeling more likely to talk to a person of another age group in public • Increased social participation and interaction • Feeling greater ties to the community and improved relationships • Improved empathy • Appreciation for diversity • Forming new friendships and having fun	Older and younger participants
Skills	• Transfer of knowledge of specific skills • Influenced decision of future work areas for younger people	Older and younger participants
Wellbeing	• Improvements in wellbeing, quality of life, and life satisfaction indicators	Older and younger participants

Sources: Burnes (2019), Canedo-Garcia, et al (2017), Gerritzen (2020), Giraudeau and Bailly (2019), Jarrot et al (2019), Jarrott (2021), Krzeczkowska, et al (2021), Martins (2019), Orte, et al (2018); Peters (2021), Ronzi, et al (2018)

A review of the academic literature reveals a wide range of evidence-based outcomes achieved through intergenerational activities. Table 7.1 summarizes outcomes data from peer-reviewed systematic reviews with a total number of participants greater than 55, and only includes studies published after 2016.

Three popular models for intergenerational engagement

Many models from the grass roots were replicated successfully in different geographic areas. The most popular to date are: (1) intergenerational learning between children and older people living in care settings; (2) intergenerational housing; and (3) intergenerational training/mentoring initiatives. The

purpose of sharing these different approaches to intergenerational interaction is to explore the role that generational identity plays within these different initiatives.

Intergenerational learning

While there are some age specific models within intergenerational learning, for many enthusiasts the goal is to reframe mainstream educational settings to allow for intergenerational engagement regularly to form some portion of the curriculum. That being said, there are some specific approaches that have been tested in a number of countries to establish areas where intergenerational learning can have a significant impact on the people (old and young) who take part (Sánchez et al, 2020).

The co-located nursery

The idea of the co-located nursery is to physically situate early educational provision within the same space as residential care services for older people. A leading example is Apples and Honey Nightingale, a day nursery for children aged six months to four years based in the grounds of the care home for older people, Nightingale House (Somers, 2019).

Activity began with a weekly intergenerational baby and toddler group in the care home lounge in January 2017. The nursery itself opened in September 2017, and daily intergenerational interaction has taken place since. Different types of interaction were piloted, from music making and singing, to cooking, physical therapy, and early years literacy and numeracy.

Intergenerational learning in care homes for older people

Less intensive, but easier to initiate and mainstream are regular visits to care homes for older people by schools and youth groups. InCommon is a London-based organization that works with primary schools and housing associations to deliver a year-long learning programme. The same school classes meet with the same group of older people living in sheltered housing, and they are supported by specially trained facilitators from InCommon (Somers, 2020).

Normally, children aged eight to ten participate, and will go to the same local residential setting regularly throughout the year. A pre-meet activity takes place with each aged demographic before the two groups come together. The purpose of this activity is to help each generation think about what might be different from the perspective of the other generation. In this sense, generational identity is affirmed before the two interact. Interestingly,

there are moments in an intergenerational session where one's generational boundaries are both solidified and deconstructed, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Recently in the United Kingdom, a wide-scale intergenerational program was launched called Care Home Friends and Neighbours Intergenerational Linking. This is a joint initiative run by My Home Life England at City, University of London, and The Linking Network, a charity based in Bradford. Funded by Dunhill Medical Trust, the aim of this three-year programme was to provide funding, training and support to 11 regional charities. Each charity, in turn, served as a local community broker- identifying schools, youth groups and care homes to work with. Each local area in England is tasked with creating 10 intergenerational links, leading to 120 intergenerational programmes (Care Home Friends and Neighbours, 2022).

Pre-meet activities were delivered with the children and older people taking part. With an average of 25 school children and 10 residents taking part per link, more than 4,000 participants in England engaged in reflections on generational identity. Although the British examples are easiest for this researcher to comment upon, initiatives to bring children and older people together through mainstream state education provision are occurring throughout the globe.

A leader in intergenerational learning can be found at the Macrosad Intergenerational Reference Center (CINTER) in Albolote, Granada, Spain. Opened in 2018, it runs an intergenerational nursery and a day centre for older people. At CINTER, interactions between old and young are both planned and spontaneous. This is what many intergenerational advocates hold as the highest standard of interaction: where old and young are supported to interact but also where they can initiate their own relationships. The activities that take place at CINTER are supported by researchers who are regularly onsite and who support the programme by both collecting and sharing evidence-based approaches.

According to CINTER, 'The purpose is to learn from each other and with each other how to live better and be happier throughout the life cycle based on collaboration and relationship between the different generations' (Macrosad Chair of Intergenerational Studies, 2022). Many other countries have examples of intergenerational learning (Together Old and Young, 2022).

Intergenerational housing

Turning to intergenerational housing models, the best of these embed opportunities for intergenerational connection in the design of the housing itself. One innovative example is Bridge Meadows in the United States, which adopts a whole-community approach to intergenerational engagement.

Bridge Meadows began in 2005 and works with the motto 'When we're connected, we belong'. Bridge Meadows created new communities where foster and adoptive parents live in affordable and purpose-built housing, alongside older people who live in affordable housing onsite. The communities have parks located in the centre of each neighbourhood and include additional facilities. Older people offer wrap-around childcare and support to the foster and adopted children while parents are working. Here, the whole community is invested in supporting these children grow and flourish. Intergenerational activity is woven through daily life (Bridge Meadows, 2022).

Part of the Bridge Meadows concept is to address challenges faced by foster and adoptive families. Older people are given incentives to live in the community, and then provided with the opportunity to participate in after-school care and other community events. As a result, newly formed foster and adopted families have better rates of success because they are living in an intergenerational community that supports them.

The more common form of intergenerational housing is when older people living alone with spare bedrooms are matched with university-aged students or young professionals in areas where housing is expensive and limited in supply. In these programmes, younger people pay little to no rent in exchange for a set number of hours spent supporting the older person. Here the older person is able to live at home without having to go into care and other settings. Homeshare UK is an example of this mutually beneficial housing arrangement. The organization is a network and matching service that 'brings together people with spare rooms with people who are happy to chat and lend a hand around the house in return for affordable, sociable accommodation. Together, householders and homesharers share home life, time, skills and experience' (Homeshare, 2022).

A third type of intergenerational housing is when multi-family housing (apartment buildings, for example) is designed to bring a mix of aged populations into a shared space. These have been piloted in Spain and Japan with great success. In these communities, emphasis is placed on communal spaces for meeting and gathering, and resident views are included within the design process (Kaplan et al, 2020).

In the US, the Chicago-based organization HOME (Housing Opportunities and Maintenance for the Elderly) has provided housing for low-income older people with intergenerational opportunities for 40 years. It describes itself as an organization that 'fosters joy, independence, and connection for low-income seniors'. The organization states 'we recognize that living in a community is as important a human need as food and shelter, and our intergenerational housing model provides just that' (HOME, 2022). The non-profit runs three intergenerational housing apartment buildings where older people can choose to live independently in their own apartment while

participating in intergenerational community events, or they can choose to live in mixed family-like settings.

Intergenerational training and mentoring initiatives

Intergenerational training and mentoring initiatives pair old and young together with the purpose of transferring skills between age groups. These initiatives tend to focus on bridging identified knowledge gaps. While these programmes often deliver on their original goals, and help foster new relationships in the community, they are also frequently the most structured and hierarchical. Education and housing activities allow for spontaneity of interaction more easily, where a place of learning or living can often be the backdrop against which more organic relationships emerge. Because of this, generational identity often plays a different role than it does within a training or mentoring scheme.

Here is one example. In April 2010, an e-learning program called Email Mentor Communication was launched between Chaminade University and Inter Exchange Inc. The program brought older adult volunteers from Hawaii together with Japanese students in Japan who were learning English. The purpose of the programme was to help the Japanese students improve their written English while creating meaningful volunteer opportunities for the older adults. The older volunteers were instructed to pose open-ended questions and to not correct any errors in the emails sent by the Japanese students. The purpose was to build confidence, rather than accuracy.

In a completely different approach, a new organization, Eldera, was launched in the US but has an intended global reach. Eldera is a 'free for the user' network where mentors, defined as anyone 60 years of age and older, and children aged 5–18 (signed up for and managed by their parents) can connect online and enter into a mentoring relationship that begins as topic or subject specific. One testimonial shares:

> It's good for the kids, good for the mentors, and good for the parents of the kids. I'm a mentor myself to a 6-year-old girl from Houston who is terrific. She taught me ballet, shares the books she writes and I share the one I wrote for kids. We read together, play games, and have just gotten to know each other and care about each other. Along the way, I've become friends with her mom, who has her hands full and is so grateful to have another caring adult in her daughter's life. (Eldera Mentor, CA, quoted in Eldera, 2022)

The Mentoring Alliance, based in Singapore, runs a network based on a specific 'intergenerational mentoring service model'. This model includes criteria for successful and effective mentoring that connects older adults

(between 21 and 70 years of age) to youth (people aged 13–21) for a duration of 6–12 months. The programme includes 20 sessions, 10 which are for groups and 10 for individuals. The Alliance also runs a National Mentoring Summit annually (Mentoring Alliance SG, 2022).

All of these different approaches to intergenerational mentoring have a stated purpose to decrease loneliness of participants and to increase self-worth and self-esteem. The agent of change is the connection between old and young. 'Pairs' mentoring is a model which has been demonstrated to work across country, cultural and socio-economic contexts. In part, this is due to the clear roles each participant has in the exchange.

Further, the initial mentoring relationships can often spark contact between extended family members and carers, widening the circle of people who are impacted by the initial friendship.

What all intergenerational engagement has in common is the extent to which the planned activity becomes a backdrop for relationship-building, and the potential for one intergenerational connection to create wider connections in a community.

Discussion

Researchers documented the evidence base for a wide range of positive impacts for participants in intergenerational projects across different types of interventions around the world, from low to high income countries. The common denominator in all of them is the quality and depth of the relationship between an older and younger person. One expert created a model to understand the different levels of intergenerational engagement a range of contact can achieve (Kaplan, 2004).

The seven levels of intergenerational contact are described in stages as follows:

1. Learn about the other age group
2. Seeing the other age group but at a distance
3. Meeting each other
4. Annual or periodic activities
5. Demonstration projects
6. Ongoing intergenerational programmes
7. Intergenerational community settings.

The notion of this scale was further developed by practitioners across several community and cultural contexts. What follows are examples of how these different engagement levels were achieved from various real-life intergenerational projects. The examples are taken from the Care Home Friends and Neighbours Intergenerational Linking Project in England,

as well as case study examples from the Generations Working Together resource library.

As explained in Table 7.2, intergenerational connection is best viewed on a scale that ranges from one-off meaningful events through to relationships where people who are not related live together in new intergenerational structures. They take place in many different places around the world, in low-, middle- and high-income countries alike.

Taking a step back from practice, what does the emergence of intergenerational programming signify in historical terms? What can be understood from this newfound interest in creating intergenerational connections between people who are not related to one another?

Impact on participants: generational identity in motion

Intergenerational engagement is an effort that serves different purposes for different stakeholders. With the growth of intergenerational initiatives, often funded by the public and non-profit sectors, the question arises *what* purpose and for *whom* does this type of activity serve?

In many ways, intergenerational practice can be seen as a type of solution or policy remedy to address the problems created by social and economic age segregation. Advances in medicine and living standards globally have led to an ageing population that is living longer. Older adults face longer periods of time out of the job market and longer periods of their life span living in isolation. Branded as part of a new industry tackling ageing, intergenerational initiatives have been positioned as everything from a social policy remedy for the additional challenges that older adults face in the later stages of life, through to life-enhancement opportunities for middle to high income retirees. Similarly, intergenerational projects have been aimed at marginalized youth or school-aged children identified as having additional learning needs, all the way through to extra-curricular opportunities for young people to learn from experienced older adults the secrets to success and getting an advantage in life.

An obvious challenge to many of the models presented in this chapter is: to what extent do the participants have agency and are they able to really decide whether or not they wish to take part? This is particularly a challenge when it comes to very young children and those at the very end stages of life.

The 'intergenerational' dimension of the model also needs some interrogation. In what ways is this really about different generations rather than simply different age groups? The Scottish charity Generations Working Together deals with this issue by defining intergenerational work as that between groups of at least 25 years age difference. This also ensures that they focus not solely on the age groups at the extreme ends of the scale but

Table 7.2: Seven levels of intergenerational contact in practice

Level of intergenerational contact	Description
1	Discovering what the lives of people in other age groups is like; however, there is no actual contact of any kind. Participants discussing 'age' that refers to a different generation than themselves. Exploring aspects of that age groups lives and also expressing their views, perceptions and age assumptions. Examples: *school children learning about the life cycle and older people living in care homes, older people watching a television programme about teenagers and modern society.*
2	Younger and older people connect through activities that are positive but there is no actual face-to-face contact. Examples: *sharing stories about each other through letter writing, making videos and sharing pictures and music.*
3	The first get-together of a group of younger and older people; however, it is only a one-time experience. Younger and older people meet in the same place but not as part of a structured intergenerational activity that aims to achieve intergenerational outcomes. Examples*: young people visiting an older person as a one-off event; young and old come together for an arts event.*
4	These get-togethers occur on an annual or regular basis. They might be tied to established events in a local village/community or as part of an organizational celebration such as Global Recycling Day, International Day of Older Person, World Children's Day or World Book Day. Example: *holding an intergenerational sports day at a local nursery or school in partnership with a local care home.*
5	These initiatives involve regular get-togethers and shared activities that promote the forming of relationships. There is much dialogue across the ages, sharing and learning. Examples: *younger and older people sharing skills and life experience, repairing, and maintaining bikes, intergenerational gardening and farming groups, learning new skills such as how to use a mobile phone or get online.*
6	These are intergenerational programmes from the previous category that have been deemed to be successful/valuable from the perspective of the participating organizations. These have been integrated into their general activities and gained support to become a sustainable part of the organizations future working practices and approaches. Examples: *A school-based volunteer programme in which structures are established to train older volunteers, place them in assignments, and provide them with continuing support and recognition on an ongoing basis as an integral part of the school.*

Table 7.2: Seven levels of intergenerational contact in practice (continued)

Level of intergenerational contact	Description
7	Values of intergenerational interaction are infused into the way community settings are planned and function. There are many opportunities for meaningful intergenerational engagement, and these are embedded in social norms and traditions. Examples: *a community developed as an intergenerational setting where older and younger people live together and help one another, a community park designed to attract and bring together people of all ages and accommodate varied (passive and active) recreational interests.*

Sources: Adapted from Kaplan (2004); Generations Working Together (2022); Care Home Friends and Neighbours (2022)

also can for instance bring together young adults with adults who are later in their working lives.

The label 'intergenerational' can also implicitly assume that the groups involved hold strong generational identities. This is again a particularly flawed assumption in relation to young children. It is difficult to claim that generational identity is a consideration for very young children when they engage in intergenerational engagement. However, we do know from research that when small children play regularly with much older people, they incorporate the symbols of old age into their imaginary play and they often show greater empathy towards people with a wider range of physical and cognitive abilities as they get older.

For much older participants, the notion of generational identity can often seem arbitrary. Older people living in care often report to researchers that they don't have anything in common with others they are living with except their age. Two people born at the same time and even growing up in the same neighbourhood can still have had two very different sets of life experiences. Sometimes, generational identity can be very superficial, as the trait held in common may be limited to age and location of birth. These views were often shared by residents at the care home Nightingale Hammerson in London, after intergenerational sessions with the nursery children were held. Yet, if a popular song from the residents' youth was played, older participants felt anchored in their specific generational identity. Many residents would then reminisce and enjoyed spending time in the memory of a shared historical experience (Gerritzen, 2020). Having generational benchmarks in common with other elderly people in care home settings often enabled residents to settle into care home life faster.

In an intergenerational engagement session, history and age demographics often do play an important role. For example, in order to support the

forming of new relationships, session leaders will ask each aged group to identify what they have in common with each other, and where they have differences. Further, older participants are often asked to share what life was like for them when they were the age of the younger person they are working with or living with. The notion that retirees in the present day feel a sense of commitment to younger people and choose to volunteer their time to spend with them can be traced back to a specific set of values that those who were alive during the Second World War share with one another: putting others before themselves.

From the younger person's perspective, meeting and interacting with someone significantly older than them creates a direct link to modern history. Some studies have captured participant feedback where younger people share how forming a relationship with an older person they are not related to has helped them better understand modern historical events. Older people become a direct link to recent history and a younger person get the chance to hear a first person encounter but also to interrogate this experience directly. Much of the feedback from participants across ages, cultures, and geographic areas refer back to the importance of the relationship and human connection.

When feedback is captured from younger participants about what they are looking forward to before an intergenerational programme begins, their responses are almost always extremely positive, and they enter into the sessions expecting they will learn something from those who are older than them. This finding holds up even when the older people they are meeting with come from different countries, cultures or socio-economic backgrounds. Ultimately, human connections form and build into meaningful relationships against the backdrop of an intergenerational engagement session. Young and old can form very strong bonds, even with very little in common with one another.

Is the rise of intergenerational practice a way to address the limitations of modern family structure and practice? While it is difficult to prove this, the current evidence-base points to an affirmative answer. First, intergenerational programmes are more prevalent in societies where there is age segregation and isolation, and where it is not uncommon for people to live on their own for many years. In societies where multi-generational households are prevalent (India, South Africa) fewer intergenerational programmes are found.

Second, when many older participants feed back about their experiences, they share a desire to re-live what family life was like for them when they were younger. Children and youth report finding 'second grandparents' and, in some cases, more idealized versions of grandparents. 'Elder friends', as they are sometimes called, are able to fill in the gaps smaller modern households have, with older volunteers offering time, expertise and the

ability to pay attention, without placing the same demands on families that older relatives might.

While the motivations for engaging in intergenerational projects may differ depending on the individual participants, the glue that makes programmes work is the need to connect to other humans who are further along life's journey. For those at the tail end of life, there remains the desire to connect to those who will take their place.

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8

A Multigenerational Self and a Multigenerational Society

Nigel Williams

How could we, both as individuals and society, benefit from a multigenerational role and relationships? This question requires an exploration based on ancestry, psychosocial research and psychotherapy of hidden processes that involve the way in which memory and identity emerge between and across the generations. These insights in turn can inform social problem-solving and action.

We have lost our multigenerational society in the West. With little teaching of contemporary social history, such as the process of de-industrialization or what stands behind refugees seeking asylum in the UK, or indeed the longer sweep of troubled history, we struggle to understand transgenerational trauma transmission. Identity is lost and narrowed in modernity, and this stimulates a growing interest in ancestry and roots.

The idea of a multigenerational self is not new and is indeed deeply embedded in the culture of First Nations people (Atkinson, 2002; Peltier, 2018) who see this multigenerational self as extending for seven generations, comprising three generations in the past and three unborn in the future, with the everyday self or ego occupying the middle zone of this deep self in time. There is also a significant theoretical tradition in the social sciences, literature and psychoanalytic thinking on generational dynamics. The working distinction between inter- and transgenerational dynamics – corresponding roughly to shorter-term and longer-term social memory – is important (Williams, 2021, p 15) as is the idea that some generational relationships have an unconscious component in them. Also central is the idea that generations are social forces in history and society, as well as in the life of the individual. By shorter-term generational memory, I refer to memories that carry between one generation to the next (intergenerational),

and longer-term referring to those that travel across multiple generations (transgenerational).

Let me offer an example drawn from a composite of research-based stories. Katherine, troubled by childhood memories of war, seeks help in her mid-life through psychotherapy. Her memories seem to be focused on an apparently single event – a mass drowning of other women in her village and surrounding settlements. The episode left her terrified and bereft of sisters and friends and was the start of a diasporic dislocation involving a long journey on foot with older family members. She now lives in another country and has an ethnically mixed marriage. The memories started to press when her own children became the age she was when this happened in the war-torn Europe of her childhood.

Her search for help through therapy comes from the belief, which is also a cultural one, that a traumatic experience can be treated psychologically, that its long-lasting quality is a form of mental illness. This conviction has also led to the less helpful idea that her memories can be 'taken away', that therapy could lead to a successful amnesia. This example illustrates both a dilemma for a therapist about how to offer help as well as a cultural problem of how to address an experience that was not acknowledged within the community.

The problem of falling silent is always a complex one. In this example there is a more familiar intergenerational issue of the decision by one generation not to speak of painful experiences, or to minimize their effects on the next. The consequence of this is to make frightening and puzzling experiences impossible to contextualize for the children involved. This is often accompanied by a wider transgenerational issue of not speaking about a community or nation's destruction, including the specifics of the way in which war was conducted against a civilian population.

It is helpful to think about such resonances in the context of recent wars, for example Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Rape is still a weapon of war. Because of social media and a culture more informed about relational psychology, people are talking about their experiences as they happen; secrets are thus much harder to keep and internalize and so the first movement towards falling silent in shame and fear is harder to make. Warring nations fight over their truths and lies in real time, as well as later in war crimes courts or in history books. Remembering, for contemporary war-torn people, will be different in current and future generations. We do not yet know how these differences will play out, but there are some indications that generational theory can shed light on this.

In our example, we can see how the choices made by different generations to talk or not talk of the loss of family members and friends leads to a narrowing of memory in one troubled individual or group that has had this diasporic experience. The experiences are akin to an illness or malaise.

The fate of this experience and how it might become interred significantly depends on how trauma is thought about both culturally and individually.

If we adopt a seven-generation approach to think about social responsibility, then the trauma can be addressed in the context of helping future and unborn generations. This can be adopted very immediately and directly in our imaginary example by focusing on the problem of nurturing and relating to a new generation before the fog of war has dispersed. The woman's traumatic preoccupation may be interrupting her capacity to mother her children. Therapy can help this. But this insight does not make a multigenerational self; this requires cultivating a sensitivity to the transgenerational aspects of intergenerational experience, those that go beyond the individual self. This involves consciousness, memory and an understanding of what has been called unconscious intergenerational and transgenerational transmission (Abraham and Torok, 1994; Davoine and Gaudillière, 2004).

Generations exhibit a degree of consciousness of becoming generations rather than remaining as age cohorts. This varies greatly, however, with some generations overshadowing others, somewhat like the successful country in a war, while whole generations can be left voiceless or disenfranchised (Edmunds and Turner, 2002). However, because memory in the deeper time of the generations is both socially extended and distributed, it is often the less conscious aspects of human life that contribute to a multigenerational understanding of the self. Our sense of self is both extended and shut down by social and cultural events and forces. It is now more possible to explore one's roots if one is, say, British West Indian than in previous generations. This is partly thanks to the exposure of the botched reparations to the Windrush generation, named after the ship Empire Windrush that first brought Caribbean Commonwealth citizens and their children to Britain in 1948 and those who continued to arrive until 1971, in a context of post-war reconstruction and shortage of workers. The scandal which broke in April 2018 and saw the UK government apologize for deportation threats made to them after decades of residence and citizenship and the surge of anger and social action which collected around the Black Lives Matter movement in the international protests of 2020 make it more possible for younger people to talk about racism, rather than adopting the stoicism shown by their first-generation migrant parents. The republican turn in West Indian politics linking a move to independence from the British Crown and the demands for restorative justice for slavery have had the same effect. This is an example of how a social transgenerational shift is often needed for intergenerational patterns to change. Holding a multigenerational perspective suggests that the children of current young Black British people will be parented differently as a result. This involves a shift from modelling passive stoicism toward racism versus an active pride in Black History: these are very different strategies. Once parenting changes, much else follows.

To have coherence over time, a multigenerational self must have ways of making internalizations or taking actions that produce memories of how to respond in certain situations. Sometimes this 'memory' is held in intergenerational storytelling on the one hand, and transgenerational, cultural processes on the other. By implication, the idea of the ebbing and flowing presence of a multigenerational self also suggests the possibility of an extended multigenerational society (Williams, 2021, p 175). With trauma transmitted socially across and between the generations, oppressor/perpetrator and victim dynamics are often internalized between the generations leading to difficult-to-resolve social conflicts as well as mental illness (see Hirsch, 2012; Rothberg, 2019). Fractured and damaged identities make a major contribution to fragile relationships between peoples and states. The power of imagined communities, diasporic identity and postcolonial melancholia is important in thinking about relations between generations. Vladimir Putin's missive on the nature of the Russian peoples (2021) is a classic example of an imagined community underpinned by a deeply fractured sense of injured and spoiled identity. The article is both an expression of the roots of the war in Ukraine, that is, the injured Ancient Rus identity, whether real or imagined, and an implied, but not spelled out, justification for it. It is eerily and deliberately silent about the violent implications of its veracity.

Where do nostalgia and social melancholia come from? They are based on losses that, for whatever reason, cannot be mourned or for which mourning is refused or denied. This is a complex and important subject for understanding fragile individuals, groups and nation states. Brexit is another example, albeit with less catastrophic consequences than war. The discourse around Brexit was predicated on a notion of loss, whether loss of sovereignty, loss of empire and international might, or loss of funds to the European Union (EU). Whether real or constructed, these discourses were able to tap into a reservoir of un-mourned losses and injured identity.

There are some interesting links between this idea of past, present and future in a generational cycle and the hermeneutic circle offered by Koselleck (2004). Links between a chronological past, a lived present and an anticipated future hint at a dynamic and ever-changing tension between cultural and historical time thought about as chronological, and lived time in which meaning is invested. Following Heidegger, Koselleck (2004) offers a view of history as one possibility in which intricate feedbacks exist between past, present and future: 'past possibilities and prospects, past conceptions of the future: futures past' (p 6). This perspective also echoes Heidegger's most intimate interlocutor Hannah Arendt, whose sensibility for the natal process in history and everyday life is a formative and identifying quality of her work in political psychology (Dolan, 2004). Our capacity to create and tell stories that link the generations is a generative process stimulating a past-to-future

movement in mentalization and memory. The more philosophical impulse to see humanity as constituted in time and space is the basis of Koselleck's and First Nations thinking in the employment of a hermeneutic cycle to historicize and ground how we see and relate to time. The future is always haunted by the past and may explain why sometimes we seem to be drawn towards the future. It has a power apparently of its own.

Koselleck refers to the future as having a 'pull' because it is always, to some extent, a former future, something that has already been imagined, hoped for, feared and thought about. The future can also be a lost nation or people as well as a haunted personal memory (Davies, 2011). This describes quite closely the experience of people who bear longstanding grievances that go back many generations. This transgenerational haunting continually influences efforts to change and emancipate present lives. To put it another way and using the language of complexity theory, the generations and generational-based memory have the quality of strange attractors (Briggs, 1992, p 31) marking the natal points around which meaning swims into being, informing both individual, group and ethnic identity. These attractors move and change shape in time. The ancestral generational aspect of history is always potentially present for individual, group and society. When something new happens, a novel swirl in history stirs as individuals meet and struggle to solve problems.

When an experience is internalized without context, it becomes difficult to integrate and interpret. In our example, Katherine as a young girl witnesses the terrifying death of women and girls, some of whom she recognizes. Those caring for her do not offer an explanation but do take her to safety. Her parents are too traumatized and shamed by their loss of nation and subsequent diaspora that they cannot form any stories about it to pass on. Our imaginary young girl migrant is left with a terrifying experience that she cannot metabolise or fathom. Life continues, but years later after becoming a parent, a crisis emerges that leads to her reaching out for help, encouraged by those around her. Social trauma has now become more like mental illness. Fear blocks intimacy, and catastrophe stalks everyday life. On a cultural level there is a similar silence. A shame-laden history has failed until recently to produce historians and cultural commentators who can speak of the kind of experiences she has had. Anthony Beevor's *Berlin* (2002) and Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1977) *Prussian Nights: A Narrative Poem* both speak of experiences of rape as a weapon of war. However, she could not have read these accounts until recently and may have lacked a reliable transgenerational voice that could bear witness to her terrifying childhood experiences. It may be preferable to see it as a childhood post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that can be treated clinically. A multigenerational perspective involves asking what will happen to the next generation both in terms of being haunted by something unspeakable and dealing with the

knowledge that rape is still a weapon of war and that the culture of some states has not evolved to make it unacceptable.

Memory and the generations

Are the generations significant in social remembering and forgetting? Do different generations have different ways of managing what is remembered and forgotten, or of what is elaborated and what is minimized or concealed?

Conceptualizing memory in terms of the multigenerational self, and its effects on mental health suggests that loss falls into two areas of experience (Williams, 2021, p 33). The first, which I have called 'reconceptualizing loss and reaching for creativity', comes with a capacity to work through and ultimately make meaning out of loss. It is akin on an individual level to the process of bereavement. The second is where more complex processes of loss take over. Trauma or absence of recognition predominates, and the results are a different form of memory which I call 'haunting'. This requires active work both to recognize and to address. Working with haunting is always both psychological and social, being associated with social conflict and dislocation as well as secrets contained within families or groups.

An example of a haunted generation is a post-war one following a major conflict. Bodies are lost or dismembered. Actual knowledge of the loss of loved ones may be inaccurate or distorted. When I help people to trace their war-dead ancestors, the often unasked question is *How did he/she die?* This links to Freud's idea that mourning begins with the body and its fate. Individuals and families involved in this kind of ancestry research are trying to reinter a dead ancestor. They may find the haunting is resolved by new information or is further complicated by it. For those trying to trace their roots in slavery, the haunting spreads much further across time and space, being part of a diaspora whose perpetration is still fundamentally unacknowledged. The perpetrators' under-acknowledgement of this wrongdoing is connected to another form of melancholia caused by the loss of influence and power, which we might call postcolonial melancholia – the denial of the loss of empire. If a colonizing nation has had no process of reconciliation and recognition of historic harms done, this type of melancholia will be a strong obstacle and will feature in any search for identity and recognition for those who lost their nations and peoples. The oppressor and oppressed often have very different types of memory.

Examples of war deaths, dislocation and slavery bring us to another fundamental distinction in the way that memory works across the generations. Within families, memory is held with great differences in detail and complexity across three and sometimes four generations, in a process that is intergenerational. Wisdom, storytelling, physical and social skills,

childcare, problem-solving alongside intimacy or its lack, are the currency in this arena. This may also include trauma which may, if unacknowledged, be longer lasting and might start to contribute to the transgenerational. Abraham and Torok (1994) refer to this as 'generation hopping'. Memory also exists transgenerationally, over much longer periods of time. Transgenerational memories may still feel very personal, for instance being part of the Black Atlantic diaspora, the Irish famine, the Holocaust. These entail socially and culturally transmitted memories and are dealt with by different generations in different ways.

There is a further complicating issue that surrounds memory and the generations, that of epigenetics. This issue is discussed more fully in Chapter 4. My own research has revealed that those who have suffered transgenerational trauma report feeling hardened; feelings are less available than they would like them to be. Famine, war, poverty and genocide cast long physical and mental shadows on the social life of future generations.

Generations and post-memory

A further important memory process relates to the succession of the generations. Some individuals feel overshadowed by their preceding generation (Hirsch, 2008) and must actively reject intergenerational memory in order to find and validate their own life experiences. There may be anger about how their parents' generation related to the world: the anti-war movements of the late 1960s have a strong generational aspect to them. There may be a sense that a younger generation's access to scarce resources has been blocked by its profligate and materialistic predecessors. The tensions around intergenerational equity are discussed more fully elsewhere in this book (Chapters 2 and 5). Here it is enough to say that social memory is affected by the passage of the generations, and this can take several forms from mutual non-recognition to complex intergenerational connection.

In the professions, for example, generational processes occur such that knowledge and professional practice have complex patterns embedded within them. Some of my findings show the agonies and frustrations younger and older professionals go through in their work relationships (Williams, 2021, pp 136–37). Organizations that consciously aim for intergenerational balance and equity are thin on the ground. A noticeable outcome of generational imbalances can be that an organization no longer knows how to deliver its work because most or all of its older-generation professionals have left, or because it has become out of touch through the loss or underpromotion of its younger-generation workers. These intergenerational strains are typically hidden in the far-reaching neoliberal management practices that have spread through the professions during the last 20 years. The stripped-out quality of many organizations reveals a prevalence of this style of management. It has

made intergenerational collaboration a rare event, although some examples of this remain in the care of older people.

Generations and demography

In post-diasporic generations, a sense of fragility makes succeeding generations focus on the conditions that undermined or destroyed the lives of their parents and grandparents. This may lead to a focus on social justice and equity. In populations with low or non-replacement birth rates, a sense of an increasing and unbearable burden on the younger generation contributes to intergenerational equity issues. This is complicated if those societies have also turned their backs on inward migration that had previously balanced population losses. It is clear that nostalgic forms of memory that imagine and prioritize a society that no longer exists perhaps represent the most backwards-looking form of generational relationship, where nothing new could or should ever happen. A contemporary example is postcolonial melancholia, where an idealized version of empire or nation is nurtured and projected, blocking the pursuit of multicultural memory and experience. In these situations, loss seems insuperable and may have to await death, social crisis or revolution to overcome. The wider transgenerational issues of race and class come to the fore here. Black Lives Matter movements have the potential to push across generational boundaries and loosen the hold of older conservative generations of all colours. One question which my research has raised among others is what kind of learning occurs between the generations, and how much recognition and mutual understanding informs future social and political decision making.

Transformations in generational memory

A second example, which is again an imagined composite of cases, draws some of the previous threads together and describes an experience involving a momentous shift from haunting to reconceptualizsing loss, and shows how victim/persecutor dynamics can interact both negatively and reparatively.

Carolina lives in the American Midwest. Fascinated by ancestry, she has been brought up with her grandmother's stories of the family's more rural existence a generation ago. These told of the challenges and pleasures of farming life that had come about by a successful early 19th-century migration from the Rhine region of pre-unification Germany. Many neighbouring families had anglicized names of German origin. Even some of the smaller towns' names had a German ring to them. Most of the men still loved gymnastics. Those families who weren't still practising Lutherans would have weekly community meetings, albeit secular ones. They were often socialist and idealistic, and although they had migrated a little earlier, they

saw themselves as part of the Forty-Eighters who had left behind the failed revolutions of 1848 that had swept Europe. Carolina knows some 19th-century German words but fluency had died out in her grandmother's generation. Her working life was as a schoolteacher. Her parents had high expectations of their daughters, and as the eldest she returned to manage the farm after her parents died. One would be forgiven for thinking that her family and its neighbours had created a little Germany in the American Midwest. The nearby river meant that the migrating farmers could practise the form of agriculture they were skilled at in an almost uninterrupted way. The family surname was anglicized to Back. A transgenerational theme common in political migration is in evidence here: when a nation cannot rise in one land, maybe it can rise in another.

One story that has troubled her since childhood is of a great-grandfather's castration in a violent attack by members of the Ku Klux Klan. She wished her grandmother had never told her. As a child she didn't understand why the attack had happened and indeed the actual reasons died with her grandmother. This is an example of the passing on of a haunting: the event is shorn of context, hops a generation via the intergenerational storytelling from grandparent to grandchild. She has recurrent nightmares about it, and her life adjustment in returning to the farm coincides with a very unusual event, bringing the disturbance back again in the form of high levels of anxiety, shame and fear.

Enter more players: the contemporary ancestry industry and its popular genetics test, and a phone call from a softly spoken African-American, John Back. John claims to be descended from one of two slaves the family had owned and hopes to find out more about his German ancestors. Dumbfounded Carolina talks with her sisters, tries to imagine what her parents would advise and after asking for proof, starts what becomes a very enriching relationship with John's African-American family.

Her nightmares worsen during this period. Through her interest in ancestry, she has always felt there was something unusual in her family and the sense of fear and shame intensifies as she faces the prospect of telling friends and family that her ancestors were former slave owners.

Unbeknown to Carolina, John's background in conflict resolution alerts him to her distress and he spends some time exploring the context of her great-grandfather's terrifying experience. By finding the likely cause he provides a reliable transgenerational voice that gives context to her nightmares.

In these small rural communities, the Ku Klux Klan were quite likely to be neighbours rather than outsiders. The robes provided essential camouflage to people who would otherwise be known to each other. This form of violent white-on-white racism was common. Carolina's family has a deeply transgressive secret: they have a genetic line coming from a relationship

between a great-grandfather and a former slave. John's grandmother carried the name Carolina – a significant clue that had helped him find the Back family.

This intervention leads to Carolina's desire to become involved in ancestry-based conflict resolution in the context of slavery. The change of life direction eases her anxieties. The feeling of being haunted and shamed changes with the knowledge of what has (probably) happened. She now has a reliable relevant transgenerational memory supplied by her own search and also by a man whose family had faced even greater racism in subsequent generations after the end of slavery.

She instigates a reconciliation process whereby she shares her own story along with an apology for coming from a slave-owning family, and offers her conflict-resolution work as a reparative gesture. This leads her into regular conflict with people both Black and White, as she learns that her interventions are not always welcome. Her experience is that something that has been a shameful secret and a haunting becomes something relational, out in the open and more amenable to discussion. Through this work she offers a future focus, imagining a society in which racial mixture isn't dangerous or shameful. The type of memory she enters in this new phase of her life is one with which she can acknowledge loss and reach for creativity (Williams, 2021, p 81). In psychotherapy terms, this is often called reparation and is seen as a sign of resolution of deep psychic conflict. Reparation, though, rarely stands still, needing elaboration and renewal.

With John's support, Carolina's work addresses the historically locked-in persecutor/victim dynamics in her family which are still a key feature in wider American society. This episode happened in a pre-Black Lives Matter period, but it is a measure of the endurance of the problem that Joe Biden granted a Juneteenth federal holiday in 2021 to commemorate the abolition of slavery. It took from 1865 to 2021 to bring this about – approximately five or six generations depending on choice of what counts for a generation. The origin of Carolina's nightmares and haunting of her great-grandfather's punishment sat in the fourth generation, just beyond the normal range of intergenerational storytelling. She was fortunate to have a story that haunted which could be converted into actual missing Black ancestors who could speak and, in a way, set her free.

Those who have terror and slaughter in their background can be haunted by a non-specific dread that seems to be associated with PTSD-like symptoms. This is another arena in transgenerational work that often requires much research and groundwork before courage and imagination can be found to represent what might have happened. The work of Davoine and Gaudillière (2004, p xxiii) addresses this from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. The social side of this kind of 'atrocity or conflict healing' has barely been developed.

Carolina did not start out with a multigenerational self and clearly, given the history of civil war and slavery in America, neither does she live in a joined-up multigenerational society. She is haunted by unresolved conflicts as is the society in which she lives. It is fair to say that with the help of John and others she has gone quite a way to acquiring a multigenerational self and is now trying to make social interventions in the complex and intractable problem of race relations, so contributing to strengthening ties in society, and increasing multigenerational awareness. It may be that Koselleck's haunting of the future relevant to Carolina's experience is the dream of many Black and White citizens in the immediate post-civil war period of a utopian society built on racial harmony. Like a nation that could not emerge and got crushed, this vision has come, gone and reappeared in American politics. Carolina's personal and generational-hopping haunting has a direct connection with the self-conscious politics of racial hatred and white supremacy that her great-grandfather's radical and culturally open family had fallen foul of. The final haunting is in her name, which John knows from his great-grandmother. The joining of John's story to hers finds a more truthful transgenerational voice that can locate her fears in an actual social context. A link is identified across four generations and in a community riven by murderous racial hatred. Unknown fears and pervasive shame suddenly make sense. Life starts to be based on real losses and actual events, moving from haunting to the opportunity of reconceptualizing loss and reaching for creativity, and from broken social links to social connectivity.

Conclusion

Carolina's story raises and partially answers the question of where memory is held if not in the individual. It shows that, through a painful process of acquiring multigenerational insight, the idea of the multigenerational self can enrich or inform more psychological processes of individuation. The more social processes of cooperation that heal old hurts offer hope for a different future. The idea allows us to think about societies that are better or worse at affect-regulation and rupture-repair dynamics, ones where the consequences of the generations being more or less connected are understood. It also helps us to think about the power and role of storytelling in a multigenerational society as well as in a family.

In this last example, which realizes and fulfils some of the harder-to-make connections that those in my first case study struggled to make, Carolina and John in some way become ancestors. From this place they are able to help in ways that are more imaginative and flexible than they could prior to their encounters with the embodied histories of their families and society. Like new attachments, the multigenerational self or multigenerational

awareness has to be earned. It is hard work and can lead us to a complete change of perspective.

Returning to the First Nations perspective of an extended generational self, one can see it as an extension of the therapeutic idea of an extended 'present moment' but made up of several generations. We have to couple this with a rekindling of our sociological imagination and intergenerational companionship, collaboration and storytelling (Williams, 2021, p 175). In it we may be able to cultivate a sensibility for the long term that is personal, social and embodied. From this we may be able to offer new beginnings in intractable and frozen personal and social conflicts.

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9

Re-Thinking Generations from a Queer Perspective: Insights and Critical Observations from the CILIA-LGBTQI+ Lives in England Project

Andrew King and Matthew Hall

While other chapters in this edited collection have questioned the complexity of the concept of generations, this chapter offers something a little different, altogether a little queerer. The chapter draws on findings from a study conducted in England, but which also had partners in three other European countries (Germany, Portugal and Scotland). The project, called Comparing Intersectional Life Course Inequalities among LGBTQI+ Citizens in Four European Countries (CILIA-LGBTQI+) (hereafter CILIA) explored in/equalities experienced across the life course of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and other marginalized gender and sexually diverse (LGBTQI+) people.

This chapter discusses how our attempts to make sense of interview narratives obtained during the CILIA project by using a generational lens, was aided by Queer Theory, an approach in the humanities and social sciences that radically decentres and denaturalizes identity and the subject. Queer Theory challenges much generational thinking in disciplines such as our own, sociology, but also more broadly. As such it leads us to ask the question: is it useful to think generationally about queer[1] lives, or do we need to queer the very idea of generations? In addressing this question, the chapter builds on some limited scholarship concerning queer generations and whether generations, as a concept, can be applied to LGBTQI+ lives. The chapter argues that LGBTQI+ people's lives inherently queer linear,

normative and reproductive notions of generations and thereby represent a challenge and important critique within generational scholarship.

Queer lives in England

Before thinking about applying the concept of generations to the lives of LGBTQI+ people, it is necessary to provide a brief contextual overview of factors shaping the lives and life course of LGBTQI+ people in England. Here we are drawing on both existing published work but also the interviews conducted as part of the CILIA project.

Forty-eight interviews with LGBTQI+ people in England were conducted between 2019 and 2020 as part of the CILIA project. Their ages ranged from young adults, to those in their 80s. Such age diversity meant we had a sample who had lived through immense social, legal and cultural change concerning gender identity, understanding of variations in sex characteristics and intersex status and sexual orientation in the UK. Since the 1960s there has been a shift from the criminalization of homosexuality, to one of pathologization, particularly during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and finally one marked by the introduction of equality laws and policies since the early 2000s (Weeks, 2017). Needless to say, progress has been uneven and there are still considerable forms of discrimination, harassment and violence experienced by LGBTQ+ people in England and indeed other European countries (Bayrakdar and King, 2022). While generally there are few studies on the life course inequalities experienced by intersex people. Moreover, it is important to note that people who are intersex, or who have variations in sex characteristics, are significantly under-protected legally (Monro et al, 2019).

Studies of LGBTQI+ lives also highlight important differences, certainly for the purposes of this chapter, in how in/equalities are experienced across the life course. Younger queer people, although now coming of age in a potentially less phobic social milieu than their elders, still report challenges to acceptance, alongside higher than average rates of homelessness (Tunåker, 2015) and poorer mental health (McDermott et al, 2017). For trans, intersex and non-binary young people especially, there are also challenges related to healthcare: for instance, long waiting lists, lack of understanding among general medical staff and the medicalization of their bodies (Zeeman et al, 2018; Carlile, 2020). Meanwhile, those in middle and older age groups, while living more of their adult lives under conditions of criminalization and pathologization than younger people, have benefited from various legislative changes around relationship recognition, gender recognition and equality laws enacted over more recent years (Weeks, 2017). Despite this, they often express concerns about discrimination in later life settings, such as health and social care (Jones, 2018; Westwood et al, 2020) and housing (King and Stoneman, 2017).

Many participants spoke of changes in how LGBTQI+ people are viewed socially, culturally and legally which had a temporal and progressive characterization. For instance, one middle-aged bisexual cisgender woman said:

> 'I think at least three different things at the same time and I'm not sure if that's going to come up with an answer but I think constructs have certainly changed in my lifetime, equal marriage, repeal of Section 28, general visibility of queer lives and an acceptance in some strata but that is, and has always been, part of humanity. That feels all progressive to me.'

This notion of progress, albeit partial, was reflected too, by another middle-aged trans participant:

> 'I feel safer about my life going forward to some degree, but also what we've also seen, more the last three years or so, that for the people who have always wanted to give you a kicking on the street corner because you don't look exactly like them, that the licence on that is much stronger. That society in the '80s was 80 per cent quite shit and 20 per cent sort of alright, and now it's become whatever, 50 per cent really quite sound and 50 per cent much worse.'

Indeed, this progress narrative was also evidenced by some of the younger people we interviewed, who spoke of a growing acceptance that they had noticed compared to their childhood. One cisgender gay man in his 20s said:

> 'I mean, in general there seems to be a lot more acceptance. I mean, back when I was at school, gay was used as an insult and stuff like that, and I don't think anyone would have dared to come out, not really, unless you were very brave, until college age kind of thing. And I think that's got a lot better, I mean my mum works at the local primary school and they had someone in Year Three come out as gay and had like a session about it. Nobody was bothered, none of the kids seemed to be bothered, so that's quite a big improvement. I think general acceptance has got better, especially for LGB people.'

However, there was also considerable recognition that full acceptance and tolerance was still to be achieved at some point in the future, alongside intersecting factors, associated with gender identity, class, ethnicity and geography that could mitigate progress. Moreover, many participants were wary of an overly celebratory, progressive narrative, arguing instead that they felt a backlash seemed to be building and that progress could, quite quickly,

be reversed. This was commonly articulated around specific examples, such as what Brexit might mean for LGBTQI+ rights, as this young non-binary queer person said:

> 'I'm worried, certainly with Brexit, I'm worried how that's going to give more power to racist people, to homophobic people, transphobic people, I feel like we're at such a critical juncture at the moment politically. We're kind of almost on a razor's edge, it could be amazing and everything could be so much better but then also we could just go right back to the 1900s and it does make me anxious just not knowing which way it's going to go.'

For generational scholars, it will not be surprising that in trying to understand and make sense of differences and similarities we noted in these narratives, between younger and older participants, we began to think about the usefulness of applying a generational lens to our data.

Queer generations

There have been several attempts to fit the concept of generations to LGBTQI+ lives. Indeed, there is a need to think about generations of LGBTQI+ people differently, since the concept was developed without recourse to considering how gender identity, variations in sex characteristics and sexual orientation affect socialization, coming of age and formative life course experiences in generational formation and the creation of a *zeitgeist* (Mannheim, 1952).

Dunlap (2014) explored differences in coming out narratives among lesbian, gay and bisexual people in order to critically question, or 'queer', the concept of generations. Dunlap argued that a staged model of coming out was more redolent with older groups, than the more complex and less sequential experiences of those who were younger. Indeed, in an interesting epistemological move, Dunlap refigured formative historical events associated with both coming out and generational formation arguing that five identity cohorts could be discerned that queered the notion of generations. Rather than Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, Generations X and Y, Dunlap referred to Pre-Stonewall, Stonewall, AIDS crisis, post-AIDS/Millennial and Youngest generation, partly reflecting birth date but also key aspects of LGBTQ+ history.

A similar conceptual move was undertaken by Knauer (2011) in analysing the lives of older lesbian and gay people. Knauer referred to the Silent Generation and the Stonewall Generation as an important division in terms of access to a celebratory and emancipatory discourse inculcated by the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which are often viewed as the start of the modern

LGBT+ rights movement and will be discussed in more detail later. Those who came of age and lived largely hidden lives before the riots, Knauer argued, were more likely to have remained 'in the closet' across their lives, compared to those who came of age and 'came out' afterwards who were more visible, public and vocal in asserting their lesbian and gay identities.

In a more recent article, Marshall et al (2019) also used the trope of visibility, but sought to question whether the universalism inherent in generations, particularly the notion of social generations initiated by Mannheim, could be sustained when applied to queer people. Marshall et al (2019) do think that it can be – but they argue that the notion of queer generations should always place difference at its centre; doing so, 'retrieves the concept from awkward universalisms' (p 562), avoids homogenization and recognizes the non-linearity of queer lives i.e. that the moment of self-recognition, such as 'coming out' can happen at different points in queer people's lives and hence the queer *zeitgeist* that a person comes out into may not be linked to chronological age.

While useful, we felt the need to critically engage further with the concept of queer generations; to deepen and extend questions raised by others, especially questions concerning non-linearity, temporal dissonance and a refolding and re-telling of history that seemed to encapsulate our participants' narratives. It is at this point that we turned more directly and in detail towards Queer Theory. In what follows we highlight key aspects of Queer Theory and its implications for queering generations.

Queer Theory and generations, the need to rethink

Queer Theory emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the influence of post-structuralism and post-modernism in academic thought, along with growing activist disenchantment at the mainstream lesbian and gay movement and its response to the AIDS crisis (Sullivan, 2003; McCann and Monaghan, 2020). Indeed, there was substantial academic-activist crossover in terms of ideas and praxis early in the development of Queer Theory.

Queer Theory represents a complex amalgamation of anti-foundational ideas and ways of viewing knowledge and subjectivity. It is difficult to define, but two noteworthy attempts include: Sullivan (2003, p vi) who argues that *to queer* is 'to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up (heteronormative) knowledge and institutions'; and Edelman (2004, p 17) who suggests that queer 'can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one'.

Queer Theory denaturalizes identities and ways of being, arguing instead that these are emergent and performative in relation to historically specific discourses. Moreover, there are several 'needs' within Queer Theory when it comes to challenging existing understandings of identity and subjectivity, which are: the need to denaturalize a developmental notion of futurity; the

need to challenge chrononormativity, focusing instead on the refolding of temporality and history; and the need to question notions of identity and difference. In the following sections of this chapter, we explore these in relation to the concept of generations and illustrate with reference to our participants' narratives.

Denaturalizing generational development

One key aspect of Queer Theory that is crucial for re-thinking generations, and the idea of queer generations in particular, is the need to question the heteronormative presumption of generational (re)production. This is the notion that we grow up and grow old together, as a collective social group in specific historical circumstances, forming a generational *zeitgeist*, or worldview, in the process. Queer Theorists point out that such logics are examples of reproductive futurity that systematically exclude queer people (Edelman, 2004). This, it is argued, pivots around the figure of The Child, not any particular child, but the idea that The Child represents a universal social and reproductive future and the 'next generation' within heteropatriarchal futurological development. Within this theoretical framing, the Queer stands in opposition to the Normal – an abhorrence not only because of a failure to reproduce, or at least do so in the correct heteronormative ways but also as a negativity, a 'death-drive' in psychoanalytic terms, that represents a danger to the social order. The Queer disrupts, indeed subverts, generational logics and must be expunged, absented, hidden.

It is important to remember that this is theoretical writing, and Edelman (2004) does not deny that many LGBTQI+ people have children, or that many children are queer. The point is that queer people disrupt generational reproduction processes by recourse to being normatively positioned as 'outside' of these, often with symbolic or actual discriminatory and, at times, even violent consequences.

Within the CILIA project, many participants spoke of being ostracized or differentiated from their families and/or friends during childhood and adolescence. The following quotation, from a middle-aged bisexual cisgender woman, illustrates the performativity of this in cultural playground humour:

> 'in terms of that thing of being maybe a queer child or could have had awareness of that, it [school] definitely didn't feel like a very safe environment. I wasn't aware of Section 28 as a thing, but I definitely was aware of the kind of --- there was quite a lot of homophobic jokes that was going on.'

The mention of Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988), which prohibited schools from teaching anything that could be conceived as

'promoting' homosexuality as anything other than abnormal, was also a political attempt to regulate reproductive futurity during the late 1980s. It remained in legislation in England until the year 2003. Many participants referred to Section 28 as something that had affected their schooling, both in terms of restricting the curriculum and setting a wider cultural context within the school. It affected how they related to their peers and how they understood sexual difference, *as a generation*. Indeed, when speaking of the possibility of becoming a parent herself, one middle-aged cisgender lesbian stated: "I know tons of straight people who have children and … I'm worried about who would I hang out with? Would I have to join a weird straight mother/baby group and feel like a weirdo *again*" (emphasis added).

The discussion of how queer people can/do try to escape these heteronormative generational logics, which Halberstam (2011), using Freudian ideas concerning Oedipal (father/son, mother/daughter) and familial tropes of generativity, led them to emphasize the disruptive and productive potential of queer forgetting. Arguing that queer people should forget family and forget reproductive generations, Halberstam urged instead a focus on relationality, non-linearity and a web of social connections and histories not tied to a normative hetero-temporality. This is something that we noticed in our participants' narratives and how normative notions of time and history, so central to the concept of generation, were queered.

Challenging chrononormativity and refolding history

As the preceding discussion has indicated, Queer Theory takes a radically deconstructionist approach to questions of temporality and this is especially apparent in Freeman's book *Time Binds* (2010) and Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). In both works, the way that time is organized in a heteronormative way and the effect this has on queer lives is considered.

Freeman defines chrononormativity as 'the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity' (2010, p 3). This inculcates a certain temporal patterning of the life course, embedding it within capitalism and heterosexual family life. For instance, to be born and grow up within a family and within a group of peers; to form a family oneself and create a new generation. To be queer is, therefore, to be outside of this temporal framing, or to be positioned as antithetical to it. Moreover, in a call to 'forget family' Halberstam (2011) suggests that cultural ideas about forgetfulness are framed within the logics of a normative, capitalist life course but at the same time 'allows for a release from the weight of the past and the menace of the future' (2011, p 83). While Halberstam discusses forgetting partly in relation to cognitive diversity, we contend that it has radical potential in terms of generations. This is because normative generations inevitably forget queers and queer histories. Therefore, these must be reclaimed, reanalysed through

a process that involves a refolding of history, wherein earlier historical events come to have significance and meaning in ways not associated with them, or interpreted in that way, at the time of occurrence.

As we noted earlier, several studies have indicated that queer generations need to be framed according to different, altogether queerer, historical events, such as the Stonewall Riots, the AIDS crisis or the impact of legislative transformations on social attitudes and policies, for example equality policies and civil partnerships (Dunlap, 2014; Knauer, 2011). Certainly, we noticed such examples in the narratives of participants in the CILIA project. One bisexual trans woman, who was in her early fifties, stated:

> 'the world's a much better place than it was in the '80s, you know. Like I say, as a kid under Section 28, the world was so – you know, the world is awful now, don't get me wrong, but the idea the world would only be this awful in 1988 was impossible to imagine.'

A gay cisgender man in his late thirties, who defined his ethnic identity as Asian/British Indian, referred to the importance of familial generativity in his own background, but also how it had been queered:

> 'Because at that time, I'm sure the experiences of younger gay Asians are different now, because the generation of parents is … they'll be my age will be parents now. And so, if I had a gay son, I'd be like, "Yeah, whatever", kind of thing, "Just be safe". But at the time, we were, I suppose, pioneers, because there was nobody else like it. And so, we defined the way things kind of went, I suppose, in some way.'

He also discussed going to a local LGBT centre which hosted a Gay Asians group:

> 'It gave me a sense of, not collegiality, what's the word? Comradeship, I suppose. Because it had other people. So, I met my friends for life there. And we were all the same age, and we were all in the same kind of position about being Asian and being with these parents who … we were the youngest, and our parents were of a generation where they weren't exposed to things like LGBT and stuff.'

In this respect, these extracts highlight a queering of specific events or places at points in time which create a shared sense of history and generation formation. The latter participant notes how generations form but queers them with reference to his own outsider position and the creation of alternative spaces that were not heteronormative. However, while individual stories were recounted, at a biographical–historical level, several of our

participants referred to broader and more iconic historical events and in effect queered them at another level – creating a refolding of those historical events that meant something to them now in ways not necessarily experienced in a generationally formative logic at the time.

In recent years, for instance, there has been a reappraisal of LGBTQI+ historical events such as the Stonewall Riots, with a greater emphasis on the queer trans women of colour and young homeless people involved, as well as the central role of queers of colour in AIDS activism (Shahani, 2016). Within our participants' narratives, there were interesting contrasts between participants of different generations, but also similarities, in this historical refolding. Despite the extent that younger LGBTQI+ individuals may be envisioned as 'beyond Stonewall', we found that this historical marker had a significant, albeit different, resonance for them. There was a keen awareness among our younger participants of the significant role of trans people of colour in the riots – and this feature really centred in their accounts, while it was noticeably absent in any accounts provided by older participants. For younger participants the Stonewall Riots were a particularly apt story for forwarding their own generation's current political concerns, and aspirations, in addressing intersectional inequalities within LGBTQI+ communities that have come to the fore more recently and, at times, can create tensions and differences within and between younger and older LGBTQI+ individuals.

Questioning identity and difference

Related to the denaturalizing of futurity and the significance of challenges to chrononormativity and heteropatriarchal temporal logics, Queer Theory emphasizes how difference and its containment is a key organizing principle of heteronormative society (Fuss, 1991; Seidman, 1997). Queer Theory seeks to radically decentre both identity and the subject in order to illustrate how these are performative (Butler, 1993, 2004). Indeed, Queer Theorists have sought to emphasize how identities are not grounded in biology – although they may culturally be equated – but are instead fluidic fictions that can and should be deconstructed. For instance, heteronormative society and the generations that emerge from it are based on an understanding of age that is linked to biology, chronology and normative notions of development. Queer Theorists have argued that sexuality and gender identity are not developmentally emergent but affectively and discursively contingent. In short, when one *identifies* as LGBTQI+ it creates the conditions by which one understands those identities, as well as the language that one uses in that definitional and self-reflexive process. It also means, for example, that someone who comes to identify as LGBTQI+ in their 50s, after many years identifying differently, will have more in common, and share a more familiar queer *zeitgeist* with a 20-year-old who is also questioning their sexual and/or

gender identity at the time. There is, then, potential for a biographical disruption, a dissonance across and between identities, the repair of which may transgress easy notions of time/space/generation and language.

By way of example, the following extract comes from an interview conducted with a middle-aged gay trans man. At this point in the interview he had been talking about how his identity has shifted over the course of his life but also certain iconic aspects of queer history, in this case civil partnerships, introduced in 2004, were not relevant, *at the time*:

> 'civil partnerships came in, and you were allowed to marry and get married quarters and all that sort of stuff […] So, there was definitely changes, and people were a bit more open about it. But that didn't really affect me because I wasn't same sex attracted, and I didn't understand the gender thing then. Like I say, I didn't understand it at that point.'

Moreover, one older bisexual woman with intersex variations spoke about how the recent practice of identifying one's pronouns, something that she would have found important and useful when younger, when there was not a discourse about it, was influencing interactions as she got older and that discourse had emerged:

Interviewee:	But I've only become aware of people using pronouns in the last six months, they've generally started putting it on their correspondence and I thought, "Oh yes maybe I ought to do that."
Interviewer:	Is it a useful thing? Is it a useful thing to do?
Interviewee:	In certain circumstances I think, yes. Next time I go to hospital I will say, "My pronouns are…" In the care home, I've been going to the care home for a year now and somebody asked me a couple of weeks ago, "What do we call you? Do we call you him, her?" I had to tell them but it's nice that they asked. Why did it take them a year though?

We therefore have questioned whether queer generations may be better defined by the date that individuals become self-aware of same-sex attraction or began questioning their gender identity or indeed when they are able to use certain discourses about gender and sexual difference that were not available to them at a younger age. They highlight how changes in the understanding, expression and performance of sexuality, gender identity or intersex status can shift how queer people define themselves at different points in time. Not only does this challenge much generational thinking, since it decouples chronological age from the concept of generation, it also challenges homonormative ideas about who 'counts' as LGBTQI+, when

and in what ways. This latter point is implied by those who contend that focusing on universal ideas about who is (and who isn't) LGBTQI+ can actually erase important differences (Marshall et al, 2019). Additionally, it concurs with those who argue how universalizing queer experience can mean the imposition of a highly racialized, ableist and homonationalist agenda (Puar, 2007, 2017) that perpetuates existing structures of inequality, rather than challenging them. When thinking about queer generations then, we need to be very mindful that in seeking to highlight similarities of experience that difference, exclusion and diversity are not occluded.

Several of our interviewees highlighted the significance of difference when they were asked what aspects of their identities were important to them and their life course experiences. One non-binary queer individual, when discussing their multiple and intersectional identities and how other people may view them, said: "I think I'm fairly loud about everything, about being pan and genderqueer and disabled, so I think that if there was somebody else who was disabled and was looking for some disabled friends … But I don't think there's one [identity] that's the most noted by other people."

Meanwhile, one young queer cisgender woman spoke about how she was often racialized in England because of her Blackness, whereas for her, her queer identity was often more important in terms of how she defined herself:

> 'So me being Black, me being a Christian it's important to me of course but it doesn't hold as much importance as me being queer because it's like I haven't had a struggle being Black because I went to a predominantly Black primary school, predominantly Black secondary school, predominantly Black church, I was surrounded by Black people my entire life so it wasn't much of a problem. I've never had to deal with any form of racism, I've never had to deal with that. My faith has never been a problem for me either, in terms of, I've never been discriminated against because of that but because of me being queer, that's always had a huge impact that's always been the starting point for a lot of situations, and problems, if I had to say which one is the most important to me, it'd probably be my queerness because that's the one that's affected me the most. Both in my school life, my Christian life, my Black life, my life in general it's had a huge impact, so that's the part that I would say is the most important. Other people would probably say like my Blackness, I'm really proud to be Black … I've always said that I'm really proud of my ethnicity, I'm really proud to be Black. So, I feel like a lot of people would say that that's the part that holds the most importance to me."

What is important in these examples is to think about how multiple, intersecting identities may or may not shape how people belong to, and define themselves in relation to, generations (and not others); how the

intersectionality of queer identities with others, such as race, class dis/ability, can potentially transgress normative and universalistic generational labels.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with a question: is it useful to think generationally about queer lives or do we need to queer the very idea of generations? After discussing how we tried to make sense of the interviews we gathered as part of the CILIA project, we believe that there are two, somewhat contradictory, answers to this question. First, as we have shown, if we take Queer Theory seriously and its need to denaturalize and question reproductive futurity, temporality and heteronormativity, then the notion of generations often deployed in the social sciences and humanities is problematic – it needs to be deconstructed and critiqued. There can be no easy universalisms. Second, however, we have shown that LGBTQI+ participants in our study did speak in generational terms; they had an awareness of historical, albeit queer events, that had formative impacts on their lives. Therefore, we want to take generations 'queerly', we want to keep our attention focused on difference, on heteronormative power and the need to challenge normativity, but we also want to continue to speak (and write) about generations in broader ways. Our participants did precisely this, and so we think queer generations furthers academic scholarship.

Note

[1] Here we are following in a long tradition of referring to LGBTQI+ people as queer, in an affirmative and empowering shorthand, although we recognize that not all individual LGBTQI+ people would refer to themselves as queer.

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10

Conclusion

Helen Kingstone and Jennie Bristow

As this book has shown, generation is an important, productive but not transparent lens for understanding social change. The contributing chapters have demonstrated the wide range of disciplines to which generational analysis is already contributing, and shown the value of, and need for, those different disciplines to communicate and work together in future work on the subject.

The contributors to this volume tend to view and use the generations concept with what we might call a tempered but committed engagement. We share a frustration at the simplistic, reductive and conflict-inducing ways that it has been harnessed and leveraged for divisive political purposes, and often unhelpfully to replace or obscure other significant social inequalities including class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and more. Little and Winch, Amigoni, and King and Hall (Chapters 5, 6 and 9) have here particularly critiqued the way that generational discourse has been leveraged by corporate interests. Nonetheless, we feel that the concept has sufficient critical purchase, and real explanatory power for understanding both the life-course and historical change, that it is worth rehabilitating, in order to nuance it and make it fit for purpose in further study.

Identity is a term that has surfaced at various points throughout this volume. While generational identities have been a focus for recent media discourse, we contend that social generations do not solely comprise identities. Both at the level of epigenetics (as discussed in Buklijas's Chapter 4) and that of cultural change (in Kingstone's Chapter 3), studies have shown that generational location – including the experiences undergone by one's parents, and the historical environment one lives through – can be impactful even in circumstances without conscious generational identity. As King and Hall show in Chapter 9, even when individuals' primary identity is quite other than generational, they often fall back on generational language and concepts to help understand their place in society and history.

'Intergenerational' is another key term that our volume has shown is used with different emphasis in different fields. Kingstone, Amigoni and Somers (in Chapters 3, 6 and 7), writing from literary studies and social enterprise backgrounds respectively, have focused on purposive and intentional relationships and communication between people of different generations. Buklijas and Williams (Chapters 4 and 8) foreground the term's parallel use to refer to unconscious transmission between generations, both (epi-)genetic and psychological. Practitioners from all these fields would do well to hold in their minds both these types of intergenerational interaction: that some transmission is inevitable and out of our control (with both beneficial and damaging effects for the individuals involved), while other reciprocal interaction can be within our power to develop for ourselves.

As Williams suggests at the close of Chapter 8, the concept of the multi-generational self can be a way to 'cultivate a sensibility for the long term'. Solidarities of class, gender, race or national group have enabled people to understand and place their actions and situations in a longer temporal frame. In parallel ways, being mindful of the generations before and after ours (each of which typically overlap with our lifetime) can help us to reach beyond any isolated sense of self, encompassing both others whose lives are closely entangled (our own family) and potentially a very capacious humanity. Such an awareness can foreground the ways that our lives are lived in relation to those who take familial roles around us, and also historically, embedded in the changing environments and events that form us and continue to shape us through our lives.

Studying generations is an inherently multi-disciplinary endeavour, so we look forward to continuing the conversations initiated by this volume in a similarly open and collaborative way. We invite readers of this book to contribute to these discussions, by feeding back to us editors your thoughts on the book, and alerting us to areas of your own research and interest that can feed into the ongoing work of the Generations network.

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